

American Film

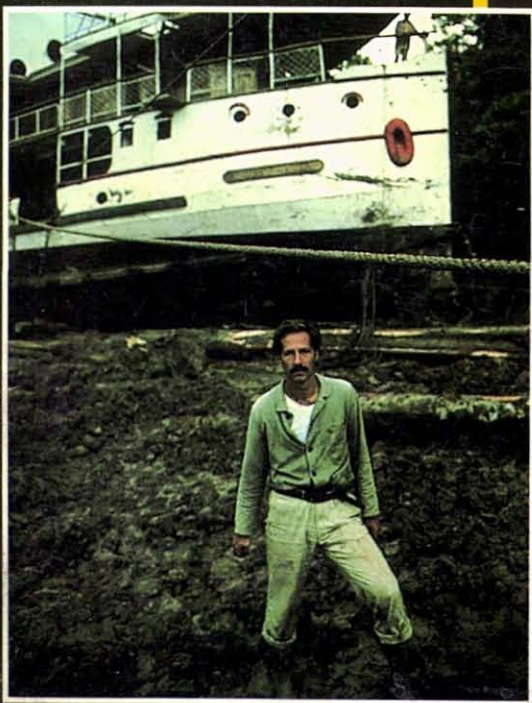
Magazine of the Film
and Television Arts

June 1982
\$2.00

Herzog and Kinski STURM UND DRANG IN THE AMAZON

ON THE CASE
WITH
STEVE MARTIN

SPECIAL EFFECTS
War of the Wizards



Klaus Kinski in Herzog's
Fitzcarraldo. Inset, Werner Herzog
and *das Boot*.



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American Film

Magazine of the Film and Television Arts

Volume VII Number 8

June 1982



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Cover: Photo of Klaus Kinski by Beat Presser. Courtesy, Sygma. Photo of Werner Herzog by Maureen Gosling.

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MOVING PICTURES

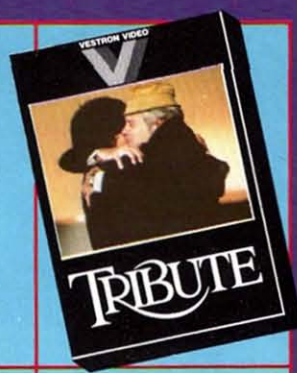
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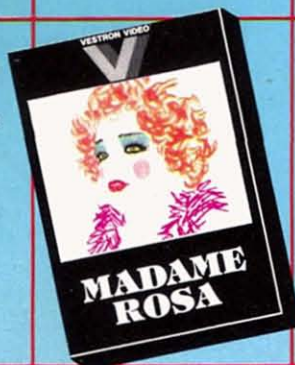
Dramatist Bernard Slade's Broadway smash comes to the screen complete with an Academy Award-nominated performance by JACK LEMMON.

A sensitive, moving screenplay woven with moments of high comedy. Also starring LEE REMICK and ROBBY BENSON.



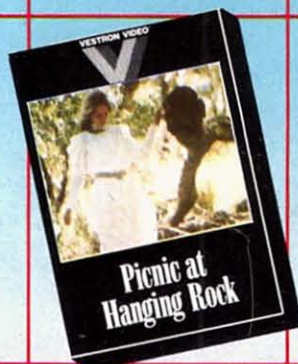
SIMONE SIGNORET gives the finest performance of her illustrious career as the battered lioness of a woman, MADAME ROSA.

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The Editing Room

A generous portion of this issue is given over to Michael Goodwin's riveting report from the Amazon jungle on the making of Werner Herzog's new film, *Fitzcarraldo*. It recently opened in Germany to enthusiastic, if cryptic, reviews. In *Der Spiegel*, Bodo Frondt wrote that "anyone who sees Herzog's beautiful, incredibly absurd, senseless film knows that the effort was worth it." The film is scheduled for release in the United States shortly, and Les Blank's controversial documentary on Herzog in the jungle will air on PBS stations around the country early this month.

Goodwin, who lives in San Francisco, has been knocking around the film journalism scene for some time. In the early seventies, he was *Rolling Stone's* first film critic, then became the managing editor of the now-defunct and much-lamented Canadian film magazine *Take One*, and then moved to Francis Coppola's short-lived San Francisco magazine, *City*, as senior editor and film critic. During the last few years, his articles have appeared in a variety of places, including *Esquire*, *Penthouse*, *Mother Jones*, and *New West*.

Goodwin is one of the few film journalists who is not actively pursuing a screenwriting career. "I've seen too many people spend too much time peddling scripts that don't sell," he says. "The odds are too low." But he doesn't think hustling a script compromises the writer's integrity. "Writers are always beholden to the people they're writing about, especially in the film business. You have to preserve your independence in the face of that unwritten agreement. I remember when I went down to Peru in the early seventies to cover Dennis Hopper's *Last Movie*. It was my first assignment. The late Ralph J. Gleason, San Francisco's celebrated music critic, took me aside. 'Once you get down there,' he said, 'they'll be trying to sell you a bill of goods. That's their job. Your job is not to buy it.' I've always remembered Gleason's words of wisdom, and they've served me well over the years."

Last summer, Goodwin joined Les Blank and his sound recordist-editor, Maureen Gosling, in the Amazon, where they were filming Herzog filming *Fitzcarraldo*. Goodwin first met Blank in the early seventies, and they became fast friends. "I think Blank simply makes some of the best films in the country," says Goodwin. "He claims to feel the same about my writing." But their relationship has always been a rocky one. "We're too similar, both the same kind of person, insecure and cranky," Goodwin continues. "He blames me for whatever goes wrong when I'm around. When I go on location with Blank, I grit my teeth in advance. The first thing he did when I got to the jungle was make me take off my watch, because he said my looking at it made him nervous."

Blank and Herzog, says Goodwin, "got along well. They are both after the same thing, the fresh image, the one that no one has ever seen." But in the hierarchy of relationships that characterized the set, Blank, Gosling, and Goodwin were low on the totem pole, condemned to drinking tepid water when there weren't enough beers to go around.

Despite the heat, booze, bugs, and general craziness, Herzog came out of the jungle with a film that may very well rescue his floundering reputation, Blank with a film that will confirm his high one, and Goodwin with his tale of fear and loathing in the Amazon.

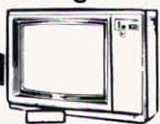
—Peter Biskind

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Letters

Casters Castigated

I must comment on the remarks attributed to Jennifer Shull in "Hollywood's Color Problem" by Michael Dempsey and Udayan Gupta (April). She is quoted as saying, "On *Frances* we couldn't use blacks and still be true to the time." Balderdash. Likewise similar attitudes expressed by other casting personnel.

Last year, "Live From the Met" telecast Verdi's *Rigoletto*. The two female leads were played by black women, Christiane Ede-Pierre and Isola Jones. The father of one and the brother of the other were both played by white men, Louis Quilico and Ara Berberian. All four were immediately accepted as the characters they portrayed. No explanation of their relationships was offered, or needed, yet certainly they were not the characters in sixteenth-century Italy as originally envisioned by Verdi.

I am unaware of any outcry by the public or the critics about this "historically inaccurate" casting, which was based on vocal and acting ability. "True to the time"? Hardly. Effective, successful, and acclaimed? Most definitely.

Opera—and ballet—lovers long ago erased the color line mentally, and are the richer for it. Too bad that the movie and television industries continue only to find excuses not to cast blacks in any role. They just may be underestimating the public, and they are almost certainly doing it a disservice.

Wallace F. Schnee

Richmond, Virginia

P.S. Should it matter, I am a forty-three-year-old white male.

Hard Times

I was very interested in your April "Special Report," "Does Documentary Have a Future?" As an active independent documentary producer for many years (since 1968) and before that with PBS and CBS, I believe we do have a future, but it may not be as easy to realize as was the case during the past decade.

NEH, NEA, CPB, and some government agencies still provide grants for films, but the total dollars are less. With shrinking resources, the competition for funds will be rougher, the demands for excellence and significance more essential than ever.

The major concern I have is that qualified documentary producers who have important films to make on matters of controversy may be unable to get their work made without sacrificing their vision. Not every first-rate documentary will get on prime-time television, but there are other ways of reaching audiences, and they will have to be constantly developed.

Robert Richter

New York, New York

Scratch Remakes

I've just finished reading that article in the April issue, "Cat People: Paul Schrader Changes His Spots," by Stephen Rebello.

Does my blood boil! Another remake of a

classic fantasy-horror film from the golden age of Hollywood. Why must today's directors and producers try to update these classics (*King Kong*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*)? Please leave well enough alone.

Thank goodness *Gone With the Wind* and *Captain From Castile* haven't been remade. Where can you find another Clark Gable or Tyrone Power? Among today's actors, not a one. Why must filmmakers try to improve upon an established classic? It's like taking a knife and ripping the *Mona Lisa* to little pieces, or chipping away at Rodin's *The Thinker*, or destroying the *Venus de Milo*.

Naomi Groot

Hicksville, New York

Writer's Addendum

I was pleased to contribute an article to your "Cableporn" section in the March issue. But because of what I understand were space considerations, I think some of the points in the final part of "Gainesville Fights Back" were not as clear as they should have been.

1. The questions of the cableporn protesters do need consideration; but consideration can be given only in a society protected by the First Amendment. Those issues and subjects accepted in other media deserve the same protection in the cable television medium.

2. Cable operators, or at least some of them, need to pay closer attention to the communities (not the "markets") they serve. Active ascertainment of community attitudes (not mere "marketing surveys") and consultation with a nongovernmental standing advisory group would help the cable operator avoid the kind of embarrassment that Cox Cable suffered last year in Gainesville.

3. I did not write the final paragraph of the article as it appeared in *American Film*, and I do not agree that the "cable industry... seems—so far—able to deliver nothing much more than sports, news, and sex." The cable industry is young and will make more mistakes, but certain cable operators are trying to fulfill its promise with improved offerings in entertainment and the arts. One can't condemn the entire industry for the failures of a few, or even a majority, of its members.

Edison McIntyre

Gainesville, Florida

Corrections

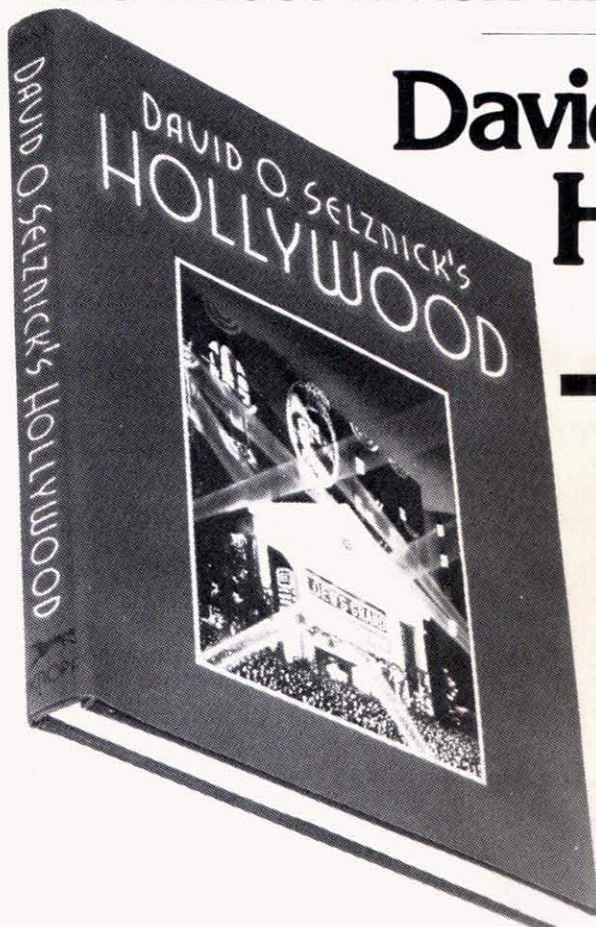
Due to editing errors in "Kurosawa in Winter" by Greg Mitchell (April), several inaccuracies slipped through. Three of Japan's four major studios had only a decline in profits in 1980; they did not lose money. *Kagemusha* won the grand prize at Cannes in 1980, not 1981. Finally, for the sake of biographical accuracy, it was Kurosawa's father who recalled Kurosawa's grandfather in a samurai topknot.

In our April "Trailers," we stated that Chuck Norris's past credits had included *Enter the Dragon*; in fact, Chuck starred opposite Bruce Lee in *The Return of the Dragon*.

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Back to Basics

J. Hoberman

Ernie Gehr's work explores the fundamental conditions of film itself.

Ernie Gehr is a filmmaker's filmmaker—an unassuming thirty-nine-year-old New Yorker whose movies are so lucid and tough-minded they could serve as primers of motion picture perception. Between 1968 and 1971, Gehr released eight films ranging in length from five minutes to an hour; before he was thirty he was recognized by his peers as one of the two or three most brilliant practitioners of what was variously called "minimal," "reductivist," and "structural" filmmaking. Then Gehr fell silent. Only recently has he begun to release new films—confirming his position as one of the key avant-gardists of his generation.

Like Michael Snow, Paul Sharits, and others, Gehr has addressed himself to the fundamental qualities of film as film: the paradox of apparent motion, the "anxiety" arising out of three-dimensional representation on a two-dimensional plane, the tension between the photographed image and its material base.

Morning and Wait (both 1968) used varied time exposures to change static interiors into percussive flicker films. The black-and-white *Reverberation* (1969) re-filmed a few shots from an 8mm home movie—retarding the motion while accentuating the film grain—to "re-present" the original images in a haunting pointillist vortex. In *Transparency* (1969), Gehr created rippling, sinuous bands of color against a blue sky by undercranking his camera from a fixed position alongside New York's West Side Highway. For the black-and-white *Field* (1970), he moved the camera so rapidly over a landscape that nature was recorded as a mad, diagonal onrush of lines and shadows. With *History* (1970), Gehr dispensed with the lens altogether, exposing the film through a piece of black cheesecloth. The result was forty minutes of seething grain patterns, organized by the viewer's eye into a kind of



Ernie Gehr's new films have confirmed his reputation as a key avant-gardist.

cosmic vista. ("At last, the first film!" wrote Michael Snow.)

Gehr's next two films became his best-known works. In *Serene Velocity* (1970), he created a stunning head-on motion by systematically shifting the focal length of a stationary zoom lens as it stared down the center of an empty, modernistic hallway. Without ever moving the camera, Gehr turned the fluorescent geometry of this institutional corridor into a sort of piston-powered mandala. *Still* (1971)—his longest film—shot over the course of a year, used static double exposures (made at various times of the day) to transmute a banal stretch of lower Lexington Avenue into a sumptuous, mystifying mix of "solid" and phantom forms. A unique synthesis of Lumière documentary recording and Méliès camera magic, *Still* brought the first period of Gehr's filmmaking to a triumphant close.

The reputation of these early films grew, but no new ones followed them. Mid-career burnout is an occupational hazard of avant-garde filmmaking, and Gehr's seeming inability to complete any more films was seen as unfortunate but unsurprising. Structural filmmaking had been accorded its historical niche, and many of its leading practitioners moved on to other fields. Abruptly, eight years after *Still*, Gehr began to exhibit new films that have placed him once again at the cutting edge of the avant-garde.

The first new work to be premiered was *Eureka* (completed in 1974), an extraordinary recapitulation of Gehr's previous interests. To make the film, Gehr performed a few precise operations on a primitive tracking shot taken in San Francisco around 1905: In a single, continuous take, a camera mounted on the front of the Market Street trolley travels forward toward the increasingly massive tower of the Ferry Building at the end of the line. Maintaining a constant rate of speed, it sails across a midday sea of pedestrians, bicyclists, horse-drawn carriages, and motorcars. The title, which serves to underline Gehr's use of "found" footage, is taken from the logo "Eureka, California" inscribed on a wagon that crosses the camera's path in the final half minute of the film.

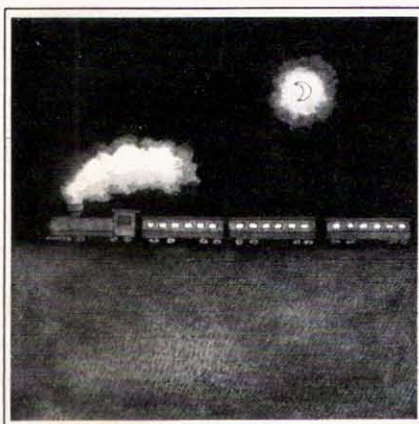
Gehr allows us to savor this, as well as the thousand and one other transitory dramas of his fossilized street by optically reprinting each frame of the original four-minute film eight times. A simultaneous increase in contrast causes the gray tonalities of the original to undergo a violent, mysterious shift with each eight-frame pulse. The background flickers, the image oscillates between abstraction and representation, and the viewer becomes acutely aware of every scratch or scar on the original emulsion.

Continued on page 21

THE CASE OF THE DANCING DEER



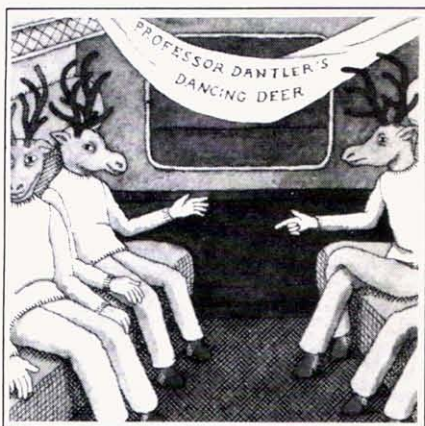
"Mere scotch! Are you daft?" railed my rotund friend MacBerth. "I want *Glenfiddich*." The steward shrugged an apology. It seemed the celebrated single malt from the valley of the deer was not on our itinerary.



"No *Glenfiddich*!" moaned Mac. Then a sly grin danced upon his lips. "A temporary dilemma—and purely academic!" he winked, bolting from the carriage. An hour passed without his return; I ventured off in pursuit.



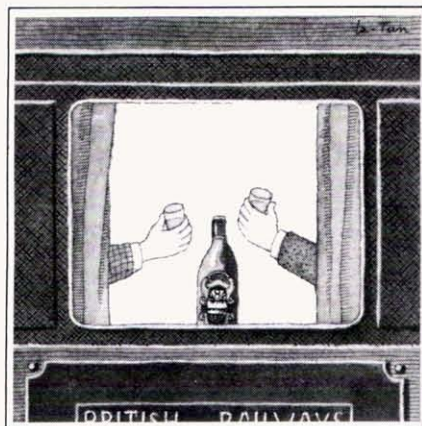
In the corridor I encountered an odd chap clutching a sheepskin pouch. From the clinking sound he made as he passed, I judged his bag to be full of bottles. And, if my ears didn't deceive me, triangular bottles at that.



My suspicions aroused, I trailed the fellow into a private car, only to be startled by a troupe of sprightly stags. 'Professor Dantler's Dancing Deer,' read a dangling banner. I promptly made tracks for the door.



Suddenly, I was confronted from behind. "Sorry about the hold up," chortled my assailant. Peering down I saw, not the barrel of a gun, but the nozzle of a bottle. MacBerth had found his *Glenfiddich*.



"Elementary," explained Mac, as we hoisted our glasses. "Who but the wise Professor would have the single malt from the valley of the deer?" A bizarre bit of logic, but the solution was eminently palatable.

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rox Corporation, which partially funded the *Middletown* project, had been worrying about the amount of obscenity in *Seventeen*. In mid-January, Xerox officials tried to take the corporate name off the films, failed, and then decided not to advertise, even though they continued to promote the series through a publicist. Xerox's vice-president for public affairs, Robert Schneider, later told *TV Guide* that *Seventeen* "had language so all-pervasive that it became something we could not suggest students and parents view in their own homes."

After PBS president Lawrence Grossman saw the film, PBS asked producer Peter Davis to excise a four-minute segment in which a boy describes his sex life. (Davis terms the scene "raw"; Grossman calls it "tasteless and obscene.") Following much negotiation, an agreement was reached: Davis would drop the offending segment and PBS would feed *Seventeen* to its affiliates in both cut and uncut versions, leaving the stations themselves free to choose.

Meanwhile, back in Muncie, the news was getting out that *Seventeen*, in the words of one resident, "contained dirty words and distasteful things." According to *Muncie Evening Press* reporter Joan LaGuardia, invitations went out to the local press, the school board, and community groups to watch the feed at WIPB, the local PBS station. WIPB general manager Jim Needham—who reportedly had once replaced the PBS-scheduled *Song of the Canary*, a documentary about toxic industrial waste, with *Let Our Children Pray*—gave over several rooms of the station to the feed screening on March 8.

Many people were deeply offended by the film's portrait of Muncie's youth. "They just did us in," said Southside principal Jim Hedge. "They filmed students in the hallways, classrooms, at pep sessions, at athletic events, at homecoming, followed our wrestlers to the semi-state and state tournaments, but none of the positive aspects are shown."

One Southside sophomore complained, "I do not appreci-

ate being represented to the whole nation as a filthy-mouthed drug addict and alcoholic! I am a straight A student and I don't believe in cussing, taking drugs, or getting drunk."

Muncie lawyer Franklyn Brinkman, representing approximately fifteen people depicted in *Seventeen*, said his clients were charging, among other things, "libel, slander, invasion of privacy..." but as of March 31, according to the *Muncie Morning Star*, he himself had not seen the film.

Attorney for Muncie Community Schools, John Beasley, confirms that he went to Southside on two successive evenings to take depositions from any of those depicted in *Seventeen* who felt they had been misled or wrongly portrayed. Jim Needham also interrogated students, videotaping one session for use as an affidavit.

On March 17, a little over a week after the initial *Seventeen* feed—following repeated WIPB screenings for school board members and the parents

of depicted teens, front-page play in the local papers, and several sessions of affidavit taking—a delegation from Muncie flew to Washington, D.C., retained the services of a D.C. law firm, and met with representatives from PBS. They requested that *Seventeen* not be shown. According to Beasley, who was part of the group, they accused the filmmakers of staging segments of the film, of having bought drugs and alcohol for the teenagers, of having misled them as to the film's scope, and of having filmed students at times when they were too intoxicated to object. They warned PBS that there might be lawsuits if the film were aired.

After reviewing the Muncie allegations, according to *Middletown* sources, PBS requested eight major cuts. Later, the number was reduced to three, without which PBS would not air the show. DeMott and Kreines say they were asked to delete a sequence at a carnival in which white girls are seen hanging out with blacks, an in-

terracial kiss, and a shot of the younger brother of one of the film's central figures sharing a marijuana cigarette.

Eventually, after many sessions with *Middletown* and PBS lawyers in New York and Washington, Davis, Kreines, and DeMott decided to withdraw *Seventeen* from the series. DeMott felt that the film itself had been swallowed up by "the publicity, the hype, the event." In the context of parental and community pressure on the students, and the threatened lawsuits, DeMott says, "It wasn't our film any more. It was a dispute, a controversy, a legal document. If it had been shown on TV in Muncie, everyone would have watched it, but I'm afraid nobody would have seen it. Perhaps someday, when this mess is over, the film we actually made can be seen."

The PBS telex to its affiliates which announced the withdrawal of *Seventeen* refers to "questions raised by several minors concerning their participation in the program," implying

Chariots of Fashion

Milena Canonero's Oscar-winning costume designs for *Chariots of Fire* have sparked the greatest life-imitates-art phenomenon in the fashion industry since *Annie Hall* made layers of oversize clothes de rigueur for women. But this time it's men who are dressing like their celluloid heroes. Pastel shirts with white collars and French cuffs, ascots, Norfolk jackets, and patterned vests with lapels will bring back dressing up this fall, as fashion-conscious males trade their jeans for "the new elegance."

"I was feeling a need for a return to a vintage, gentlemanly mode of dress at the same time the movie was being produced," says Ralph Lauren, one of the designers most associated with the *Chariots* look. "The movie... inspired me to continue even more fully in this direction." Vangelis's *Chariots of Fire* sound track backed up spring



Ben Cross and Ian Charleson make elegance look easy in *Chariots of Fire*.

fashion shows in New York and Paris this year. Both Lauren and Perry Ellis used the music. (Menswear designers also felt the influence of PBS's *Brideshead Revisited* this year, showing the tweedy British styles popularized by Charles and Sebastian.)

Early this spring, John Jay, Bloomingdale's creative director, gained permission from Warner Bros. to use the *Chari-*

ots logo for a twelve-part series of menswear ads featuring the "look." Jay commissioned Lord Snowdon to photograph the film's stars, Ben Cross and Ian Charleson, in "stiff, formal poses to reflect the style of the era." Half of the ads were shot on location in Britain.

"It seems almost a coincidence," says Milena Canonero, modestly noting that fashion designers were dreaming up their spring and fall lines even before *Chariots* had been released. "Things always turn around. Styles come back again—like the punks in England remind me of the *incroyables* in the French Revolution, when women wore red ribbons around their necks to symbolize the guillotine and men wore very unusual hairstyles to criticize the contemporary fashions."

"Anyone who designs classic clothing has been influenced by *Chariots* this year," says Norman Karr, executive director of the Men's Fashion Association. "We're in a revival of elegance. People feel like getting dressed up again."

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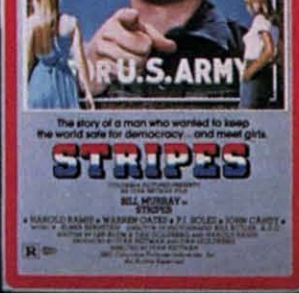
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Kramer vs. Kramer



Neighbors



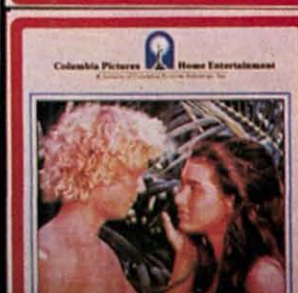
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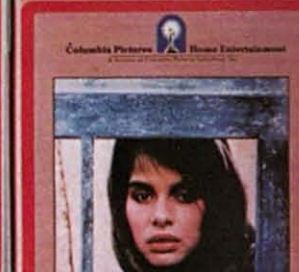
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that the reason the show was dropped was a legal one: DeMott and Kreines had neglected to obtain releases from the parents of some of the teenagers they filmed. As Beasley told the *New York Times*, "There wasn't a skirt above the knee or anything like that, and it wasn't a witch-hunt or censorship. The real issue is whether there was informed consent on the part of participants."

For their part, DeMott and Kreines argue that filming the students during the course of a year—without hidden cameras or even telephoto lenses, but rather at a distance of approximately two and a half feet—constituted de facto informed consent. One source close to the negotiations, who did not wish to be identified, said that it was PBS's programming department, not its legal department, that demanded the cuts.

PBS refuses to discuss the negotiations for publication; spokesman Eric Sass refers to the telex, adding that further comment "would be unfair to Peter [Davis], whose integrity we have a great respect for."

Even Davis is confused by the offhand intensity of DeMott and Kreines's gaze. Defending the film in *People* magazine, he likens it to "bringing back specimens from the deep," as if there were something otherworldly and alien about working-class youth.

But Davis insisted to the *Times* that "not one inch is staged in any way or in which people did not know and permit the filming to be done." And elsewhere he defended the extracurricular focus of *Seventeen*: "In the beginning we were thinking that the film might be more about high school. But it didn't develop that way... because the kids' lives were obviously only partly centered around their school." Questioned about the violent response the film has elicited, Davis said, "I think that what's happening is that people who don't like what they see in the mirror are smashing it." Right now, said Davis, "we're all losers—Xerox, PBS, the people in Muncie, my colleagues and I, and certainly the viewing public." —Howard Rodman



The punk marauders display captives in *The Road Warrior*.

Australian Punk

What with *Conan the Barbarian* already a sure bet before it leaves the starting gate, and *E.T.*, *Poltergeist*, *Blade Runner*, *The Thing*, and *TRON* breathing down its neck—not to mention the thoroughbreds *Annie* and *The World According to Garp*—there's a crowded field of contenders for this summer's box-office sweepstakes. But an Australian dark horse may make off with a substantial share of the boodle. *The Road Warrior* is a bizarre, visually spectacular, postnuclear, punked-out cross between *Hell's Angels on Wheels*, *El Topo*, *Vanishing Point*, and *On the Beach*, with a touch of *The Decline of Western Civilization*.

The Road Warrior was sired as *Mad Max 2*, sequel to *Mad Max*, a debut film from director George Miller that broke Australian box-office records in 1979, and went on to become a surprise hit in countries as diverse as Switzerland and Japan. In interviews, Miller talks as if he's a novice at this moviemaking game, which he is, in a way. Miller's first career choice was medicine; he followed two older brothers into medical school, but in 1971, he attended a vacation film school in Melbourne, and as he says, "once I got my hands on an old Bolex, I was hooked."

With Byron Kennedy, a friend he met at film school, Miller took on whatever film work he could. The two eventually fashioned a screenplay for a

low-budget film reminiscent of the American exploitation films they had cut their teeth on at Saturday afternoon matinees. "What we were doing unconsciously," Miller admits, "was a Western on wheels." Their hero, Max, was a lone cop who cruised the outback in a souped-up black car, battling a militantly seedy bike gang.

In *The Road Warrior*, Max (Mel Gibson) is a survivor of a world war that has left gasoline as precious as gold. He decides to help the crew of a desert oil-pumping station fight off a

band of punk marauders who make the bikers in the first film look like preppies. When Max drives a fuel tanker out of the compound to let the workers escape, he ignites a running road battle that, as filmed by Miller and his crew, should prove a model for stunt work and action staging for years to come.

Miller cites many influences on the Max movies' style—AIP biker movies, spaghetti Westerns, comic books—but his reasoning behind Max's appeal is a bit more esoteric. He cites Joseph Campbell and his study of mythological heroes, which Miller claims influenced George Lucas in the creation of the *Star Wars* saga. As Miller sees him, Max is a movie Ulysses or Sir Galahad, a hero with larger-than-life qualities and human limitations as well.

For all his success, the thirty-six-year-old Miller talks as if he's still learning his craft. "On a scale of ten, I'd give *Max* a two," he says, "and I'd give *Max 2* a six and a half." If Miller ever makes a "ten," maybe even George Lucas's box-office records will be in peril.

—Tom Wiener

Rosebud Lives

"Rosebud? Maybe it was a horse he bet on once."

—a movie newsreel editor in *Citizen Kane*

"Maybe some girl?"

—Charles Foster Kane's general manager

"Rosebud was his sled."

—Lucy, in the comic strip "Peanuts"

In one of the most memorable scenes in film history, the sled "Rosebud" is consumed by flames, and the mysterious dying words of millionaire publisher Charles Foster Kane are finally explained. The destruction of the sled was just a camera trick, however, and on June 9, Sotheby's auction house will offer the original RKO prop for sale at one of the firm's Manhattan galleries. Rosebud is expected to fetch between \$15,000 and \$20,000, according to Sotheby's. A pretty price,



but for millions of Orson Welles fans who will accept no sled before its time, the forty-one-year-old toy may be worth it.

Film Criticism on Canvas

Fans of the brilliant, eccentric, and pioneering film critic Manny Farber who have been regretting his recent absence from the scene simply haven't been looking in the right places. In fact, the sixty-five-year-old writer, teacher, and former carpenter has been a painter even longer than he's been a critic, and over the past few years he's been doing what he calls "auteur" paintings—canvases that recast the subjects and methods of his criticism in a number of fascinating ways.

Using a bird's-eye view of small objects on a stagelike platform, his paintings, paeans to such directors as Howard Hawks, Sam Peckinpah, Marguerite Duras, and William Wellman, illuminate the filmmakers' styles and themes. "The compositions and structures are almost always based on my take on the directors," Farber says. "And they're critical in the fact that I'm usually going away from what I think is known territory, in painting as well as in movies."

One example of Farber's oddball approach is his *Stan & Ollie*, which is full of references to the comedies of Laurel and Hardy, but scarcely uses their

faces at all. "I wouldn't dream of doing anything that would be that easy or straight—it would seem corny to me," Farber explains, going on to describe his strategy of seeing all their films as minimal one-to-one compositions—one body, object, shape, or mass against another. (The painting was originally called "1 + 1.")

In the case of *Thank God I'm Still an Atheist*, his 1981 tribute to Luis Buñuel, Farber is playing with all sorts of toys and objects that are distinctly Buñuelian. Tarotlike cards bear

stray phrases, words, and images—"de jour" from *Belle de Jour*, "Rey" from Fernando Rey, a cow from *L'Age d'Or*, a bell from *Tristana*.

Some details are puns expressed in rebus form, so that one card with a milk bottle beside another with a licking tongue and the word "way" equals *The Milky Way*. Small

boxes labeled "1. vehicles" and "2. junk of little importance" seem to denote Farber's particular affection for Buñuel's Mexican B-films. On the right, beside a watermelon slice and lynx, is an eye violated or stabbed by a cross—which illustrates the way that Catholicism (the crucifix) and surrealism (the sliced eye of *Un Chien Andalou*) are often virtually interchangeable in Buñuel's movies.

In addition, according to Farber, "the painting's whole compositional strategy was based on that zigzag walk that the hero of *El* does—up the big staircase, or across the institution grounds at the end—whenever he's in a fury of psychological frustration and anger. That always struck me as one of the most beautiful Buñuelisms, and so instead of a serpentine circling out of this circular painting, I decided to do a zigzag. It made that picture enormously difficult, because it's a hard thing to pull off. Critically, it's trying to do something with the black humor of Buñuel almost all the way through."

Farber's paintings have been exhibited in New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and La Jolla, California. The next showing is being planned at the Gagosian Gallery in Los Angeles.—Jonathan Rosenbaum



Thank God I'm Still an Atheist, a tribute to Luis Buñuel by film critic-turned-painter Manny Farber.

The Story of O

The Catholic church doesn't condemn films any more; it simply finds them "morally offensive."

Beginning this year, the United States Catholic Conference will merge its B ("morally objectionable in part for all") and C ("condemned") ratings into one rating designated O, for "morally offensive."

The classification change is intended to emphasize the advisory nature of the system, according to Michael Gallagher, film critic for the conference,

which wires film reviews and ratings to 130 church publications across the country.

"We still believe in giving strong judgments, but 'condemned' has a ring of no room for argument. We want to get away from heavy moral sanctions, the feeling that you're doing something terribly wrong," Gallagher explained from his New York office.

The church didn't always feel this way. The original ratings system was founded in 1934 by the Catholic Legion of Decency. Nudity was at the top of the thou-shalt-not list. A strenuously moral film like *The Pawn-*

broker got a condemned rating because of a few seconds of bare skin. The offending footage was later excised, and the church reclassified it as A4, "for adults with reservations."

The perennial Christmas holiday favorite, the 1947 *Miracle on 34th Street*, which starred Maureen O'Hara and marked Natalie Wood's screen debut, received a B rating, "morally objectionable in part for all." Maureen O'Hara nude? No. She did, however, play a divorcee who was cast in a favorable light. In 1953 the William Holden film *The Moon Is Blue* was condemned for in-

cluding terms like "virgin."

More recently, *Monty Python's Life of Brian* was rated C, even though Gallagher said he thought it very funny in parts. And he objected to *Body Heat*, another C movie, because it was "fake hard-boiled," not because of its steamy sex scenes. But whereas the MPAA can keep sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds out of the theater with an X rating, the influence of the Catholic ratings system, like that of the church itself, has diminished. Gallagher believes that "most Catholics couldn't care less."

—Frank Sanello

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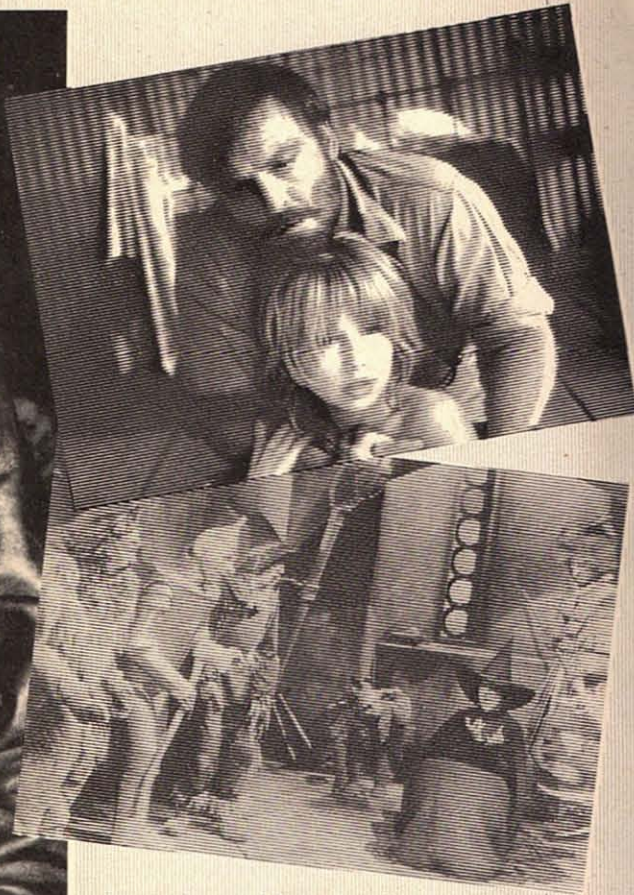
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THE VIDEO SCENE



*Pia Zadora cuddles up to director John Waters, left. Above, scenes from *Butterfly* and *The Wizard of Oz*, two films Waters would like to own on tape.*

Mondo Video

Ten divine cassettes worth staying home for.

John Waters

When *American Film* asked me to do an article on "Ten Video-tapes I'd Like to Own," I had to admit I don't even own one of those machines. And, to be honest, I'm not sure that I want one. Video makes me nervous. It's too trendy. And it reminds me of Pac-Man and those awful games. I realize I must sound like the diehards of the silent-film era who first saw "talkies" and said, "Bah! It will never work," but I think that if you are home, you should read. If you want to watch something, you should go out.

I like paying to go to the movies. I get to the theater early so I can see if the last show was crowded. I read every word on the one-

sheet and feel quite supportive of the movie business when I plunk down my four dollars. I feel just like a detective when I hand my ticket to the theater employee and make sure he tears it and hands me back the correctly serial-numbered stub so I know he's not ripping off the theater. I like buying stale Juicyfruits, reading the graffiti in the bathroom, and watching the trailers. I even feel quite civic-minded by smoking in the theater until the usher tells me to put it out, knowing I have created a much-needed job for our unemployed youth. I even like walking out in the first ten minutes if I don't like the film, but I *never* ask for my money back, because at least I've gotten out of the house

and experienced the ritual of "going to the movies."

Not only don't I have a video recorder but until a few years ago I didn't even have a television set; a friend gave me one for Christmas. I realized it was an expensive gift, but I couldn't help remembering Jane Wyman in *All That Heaven Allows*, when she unwrapped the set and saw her own reflection in the screen. Can't they make television sets and all the video apparatuses more attractive? They really clash with all styles of furniture and dominate a room. A friend of mine has solved this problem by inserting his entire set in the wall, so that only the screen shows, and putting little

I would like to tape atrocity footage from the news . . . I could play these tapes when I was having a party and the unwanted guests would quickly leave.

curtains on it that open and close like a puppet-show stage. Imagine the horror of hiding an Advent screen in your home.

My video paranoia goes even further—I'm actually scared of that hideous light that comes from the screen, especially if it's the only illumination in the room. It makes everyone in the room look older, more sickly, and less intelligent. Have doctors studied this? I mean, is it possible prolonged video watching can cause loss of hair, impetigo, or, who knows, gay cancer?

I must admit I'm a complete hypocrite on the subject. I love the fact that I sell the video rights to all my films. I'm flattered that people want to own my films. One of my movies will actually break even because of video sales. And, yes, if somebody gave me a Sony Betamax, I'd keep it, and, even though I need another expensive habit like I need a hole in the head, I'd probably start collecting appalling videotapes. I can't imagine why anyone would buy a cassette or disc of a film they could see on the big screen on a rather frequent basis, but I can understand watching a film on video if it rarely plays or can only be seen on commercial television, badly edited and censored. And, being a film neurotic, I also can sympathize with collectors who simply *must* have a tape of a certain scene or performance to watch repeatedly in order to relieve whatever film anxiety they may be suffering.

So here goes—the ten tapes I wish somebody would send me:

1. A Blank Tape

Since everyone who buys videotaping equipment essentially becomes a film pirate, I guess I'd have to become one, too. Let me say right away I'm against this. Anyone can make copies or rent a film to tape, and, since I'm not a Communist, this naturally appalls me. But if I got one of these machines, what else could I do with it? If the general public has total access to all films to watch anytime they want, will there still be a mystery about film? Will the magic disappear? I guess it's too late to worry about this, so I'd tape anything just for the thrill of ripping off the networks, their sponsors, and all film distributors. Unfortunately, there's very little on television I'd like to see once, much less own a copy of for repeated viewing. I guess my one fascination would be taping atrocity footage from the news. Assassination attempts. Interviews with murderers. I could then play these tapes whenever I was having a party, and all the unwanted guests would quickly leave. My real friends and I could experience the truly bizarre qualities of news as entertainment.

2. *The Wizard of Oz*

Yes, yes, yes. I know it's on television every year, but a cassette version would at least get rid of the awful commercials. It's one of the few movies I could watch over and over and not get bored. Well, not *all* of it, but a few segments are very special to me. The tornado scene, in my mind, is the most erotic scene ever filmed. Why, I don't know, but the sight of Dorothy opening the gate as the wind rips it off its hinges invariably makes me feel like asking somebody for a date. Any scene with the Wicked Witch of the West I'd play repeatedly until my neighbors called the police to complain about hearing it so often. Especially the shot of her skywriting "Surrender Dorothy" with her broom over Emerald City. If only I could convey this message to anyone I was arguing with in such a breathtaking manner.

3. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*

The scariest movie ever made and the biggest hit at my yearly birthday party for a friend of mine's child. If the director, Tobe Hooper, could only see all the little nine-year-olds in fancy party dresses, cute little suits, and birthday hats running from room to room screaming in terror as the film unfolds, he'd go back to what he does best—sheer horror. This year I screened *The Corpse Grinders* for the kids and they were disappointed. "It sure wasn't as good as *Chain Saw*," they griped. Nothing could top *Massacre* in their minds or mine.

Pam Grier in *Fort Apache, The Bronx*.



4. *I Spit on Your Grave*

Not the original exploitation hit from the early sixties, but the new, improved version that caused Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel to go so crazy in their reviews that the Chicago exhibitors yanked it from their theaters. This film, like *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* and *Blood Sucking Freaks*, is so odious, so violent, and so totally lacking in socially redeeming value that it is impossible to defend. It violates every taboo and gives local censors and Women Against Pornography something to really howl about. Starring Camille Keaton (Buster's niece!), it is a *Death Wish* rip-off about rape. Poor Camille is almost totally nude throughout, bleeding profusely as she is first brutally raped by a bunch of goons and then recovers to murder them and castrate the leader (with outboard-motor blades). The ultimate sin—portraying rape to titillate male fantasies. The vice squad ought to watch every person who actually buys a copy of this tape. It even managed to offend me.

5. *Endless Love*

My favorite film of 1981—a hilarious American comedy and totally unintentional: the best kind. A worthy successor to a long line of howlers—*The Other Side of Midnight*, *Mahogany*, *Once Is Not Enough*, *The Love Machine*. I'd like to own this film because it will be cut for television, and you can be sure it will never be revived for repertory theaters. It manages to give "camp" a bad name. Even the teenage audience it was intended for laughed it off the screen. The film stars my favorite model and doll-turned-actress, Brooke Shields, and her endless love, Martin Hewitt. Mr. Hewitt, a onetime parking lot attendant, won a nationwide talent hunt by director Franco Zeffirelli. One can't help but wonder what the losers were like. Favorite scene: social activist father (Don Murray) "shotgunning" marijuana into the mouth of his liberal wife (Shirley Knight) at his teenage son's party as a total unknown sings the title song. You've heard Diana Ross sing it so often that you half expect her to wander in as a guest. Amazing. A first-rate book turned into a first-rate stinker.

6. *Good Morning, and Goodbye!*

"You'll need a baby-sitter," snarled the ads for this little-known Russ Meyer masterpiece, a film that contains perhaps the nastiest and snappiest dialogue of any of his films. Written by one of my favorite screenwriters, Jack Moran (*Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*), *Good Morning* stars Alaina Capri as the horniest of all the Meyer stable of strippers, showgirls, and top-heavy madwomen. In Miss Capri's most

memorable scene, she is so aggressively hungry for a man, any man, that she drives totally nude under a mink coat in a Cadillac convertible to a construction site, parks, and leans on the horn until one of the grubby men approaches her. Also starring are the Liv Ullmann and Max von Sydow of the Meyer repertory group—Haji and Stuart Lancaster. Stuart Lancaster plays a dirty old man with such conviction that you can hear him salivating even when he's not on the screen. Haji, the most versatile of the Meyer women, can change from an exotic nymph into a switchblade-throwing slut in the blink of an eye. In real life, Haji is the talent scout for Russ and is responsible for discovering some of his most incredible actresses—Tura Satana, Kitten Natividad, and Erica Gavin. Haji is living proof that Russ Meyer's women age better than their Screen Actors Guild counterparts.

7. *Fort Apache, The Bronx*

For one reason only—the absolutely incredible performance by the most underrated actress working in Hollywood today, Pam Grier. Why she was not nominated for an Oscar for this truly scary performance as an angel-dusted hooker who blows away cops and slices up johns with a razor blade hidden in her mouth is beyond me. Pam Grier can bring class to any movie, even the countless exploitation opuses in which she's starred. But when she's given a really good part, she shines brighter than any Diane Keaton, Katharine Hepburn, or Sissy Spacek in the business. All casting agents should own a videotape of this film to see what they are missing.

8. *The El Paso Wrecking Co.*

I'm convinced that the main reason people are addicted to video machines is that they can watch dirty movies at home and not risk being seen entering a porno theater. The success of video is directly linked to self-abuse, since all but the most adventure-some tend to shy away from the practice in a commercial movie house. But at home, it's a whole different story. Since really good friends invariably end up swapping dirty stories together during a long evening indoors, the natural extension would be to put on a truly filthy cassette. I'd choose Joe Gage's *El Paso Wrecking Co.* He makes the best porno I've ever seen—gay or straight—and since almost everyone has seen at least one hard-core heterosexual feature, I'd choose a gay one. Especially in mixed company, because it would end up being more of a conversation piece. Joe Gage's men are similar to Russ Meyer's women—ludicrously endowed. He's also smart enough to violate the one rule of gay porno—he always includes women and heterosexual sex, so his films really have something for everyone. I don't think Joe Gage should ever try to go on to nondirty movies, but I certainly respect him for being a good craftsman and a top-rate filthmonger.

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SCANLINES

THE REPUBLICANS— LIVE FROM CAPITOL HILL

In March, three Republican legislators, Senator James McClure (Idaho), Senator William Roth (Delaware), and Representative Jack Kemp (New York), discussed supply-side economics with *Forbes* writer Jerry Flint and Cable News Network reporter Tom Cassidy on national television. No, it wasn't "Agronsky & Co." This half-hour show, "Conference Round Table," was beamed by satellite directly from the Senate Republican Conference in Washington to television stations across the country.

The Republicans bought the transmission time for less than \$500 and, since January, have been using satellite technology to communicate with constituents far from the nation's capital. Two regular monthly shows, "Operation Uplink" (a half-hour package of two-minute statements by Republican lawmakers on a variety of newsworthy topics) and "Conference Round Table" (a "Meet the Press" format), are either featured in their entirety or edited down by broadcast and cable channels for use on news programs. Subjects covered to date include the war in El Salvador, the political situation in Poland and in Afghanistan, the national budget, and local issues important to voters back home.

The Democrats have not begun beaming their own shows yet, but Carter Clews, director of communications for the Senate Republican Conference, expects they will before long. "This is the age of access," he says. "The Democrats can't be far behind us."

VIDEO WALLPAPER

Tired of staring at those four ugly walls? Don't despair. Environmental Video Incorporated of Manhattan Beach, California, is offering fifteen thirty-minute "background video" tapes to soothe and amuse you. The tapes, a video version of Muzak, depict such "beautiful, mood-setting locations" as running streams, waterfalls, trees blowing gently in the wind, clouds, wild flowers, and the ocean.

One satisfied customer told the company, "I can watch them over and over and not get bored." Another remarked, "Customers come into the cocktail lounge more frequently now that we are showing Environmental Video."

Designed for use in libraries, dentists' offices, hospitals, and other places where people need to tune out outside interference or just plain relax, Environmental

Video could logically branch into another genre aimed at people who need to wake up. How about a half hour of rush-hour traffic, cat fights, or the Times Square subway station?



STALKING NEW VIDEO GAMES

Walt Disney Productions will soon be the first motion picture company to cash in on the popularity of video games. On July 9, Disney will release *TRON*, the story of a young computer expert, played by Jeff Bridges, who finds himself trapped in an electronic video-game world where the arcade amusements become life-and-death realities.

Disney has signed tie-in deals with several electronics manufacturers for coin-operated, hand-held, and home video games based on *TRON*, all of which are expected to be on the market by the film's July release date.

Manufacturers predict that by the end of this year, ten percent of all U.S. households will own video-game units, and that consumers will buy fifty-four million new video-game cartridges by Christmas. Besides Disney's *TRON* games, dozens of other new video adventures are being released to meet increasing demands.

Atari, creator of the immensely popular arcade game *Asteroids*, is introducing home versions of four of its most successful arcade machines this year: *Pac-Man*, *Berzerk*, *Galaxian*, and *Defender*. The company will also introduce eight other new cartridges for its home system by December, including *Yar's Revenge*, *Demons to Diamonds*, and a new educational title, *Math Gran Prix*.

Mattel will debut twelve new Intellivision games this year, including *Star Strike* (a three-dimensional *Star Wars* spin-off), *Space Hawks*, advanced *Dungeons* and

Dragons, Night Stalker, Sub Hunt, Pinball, Royal Dealer, and Frog Bog (in which a leaping frog catches flies with its tongue). Mattel also expects to clean up with its new Intellivoice module, which uses synthesized human voices to issue commands and congratulate players when they score points.

Odyssey 2 will add a third game to its computer series, one that could break the combat-in-space motif, which has dominated the video game. Instead of spaceships and B-1 bombers, The Great Wall Street Fortune Hunt features ticker tapes and world news events, challenging armchair stockbrokers to beat out the competition without ever firing a single ray gun.

—Les Paul Robley

COMPUTER NIELSENS

Don't like what's going on between Frank Furillo and Joyce Davenport on "Hill Street Blues"? Tired of those anonymous Nielsen families making decisions for you? Well, sit down at your home computer console and tell the producers how you feel, through "electronic mail."

That's just what several hundred television viewers were doing for three months last year. From mid-October to mid-January, viewers all over the country, those who also happened to own home computers and subscribe to a computer information service called The Source, were able to criticize "Hill Street Blues" and "Simon & Simon," a recently canceled detective show. Using their computers, people at home could respond to each episode—while they were watching it—providing instant, grass-roots feedback.

"Simon & Simon's" executive producer, Philip DeGuere, Jr., a home computer owner, launched the experiment to satisfy both personal curiosity and professional need. "I'd been interested in integrating computers into stories for some time. I knew an early episode of the show would concern computer crime, and I wanted to know how computer people would react to it." To find out, he started "dropping messages" on Source "bulletin boards," inviting fellow computerists to comment on his show. "I started finding fifteen to twenty letters in my electronic mailbox every morning," DeGuere says the letter writers liked the show and blamed the network for its cancellation.

According to The Source, which is owned by the Reader's Digest Association, about a hundred subscribers responded the first week. Then the number doubled. Since The Source has some seventeen thousand subscribers (any or all of whom could respond to the show) and Nielsen uses a sample of only twelve hundred viewers, this could be a revolutionary ratings system in the making. DeGuere admits that with only a few hundred respondents participating, it's not quite another Nielsen system at this point, but hints that the process could

work better with more cooperation from The Source.

Nevertheless, it was an exciting experience for DeGuere and one he'd gladly repeat. With the time difference between New York and Los Angeles, it was possible to get critical commentary from the East before the show had even been aired in the West. "Normally you don't get this kind of feedback unless it's from friends or family. Here we had perfect strangers 'calling' us up. . . . In TV we work in a vacuum. But for the first time in my career we had a sense of an audience during a broadcast."

DeGuere took things a step further when he invited the producers of "Hill Street Blues" to join him. He also began informing viewers of upcoming shows and asking for specific responses to plot and character-



Should Joyce and Frank get married? You decide with a new ratings system.

ization. "What I envisioned was an accurate nationwide sampling that provided detailed information, much more detailed than the type of feedback we usually get, telling us very specific likes and dislikes."

DeGuere and Source executives are discussing the possibility of turning their experiment into a regular service through which Source subscribers could voice their opinions on television series, judge pilots, and even add their own two cents to the development of major motion pictures.

DeGuere suggests that an independent producer might finance a pilot himself and have it aired on cable. After viewers respond to the show he could tabulate the statistics and present a network not only with the show itself, but with demographics of those who would watch and support it. This, according to DeGuere, could break the "stranglehold" the networks now

have on research and on creative decisions. It's "a way for the creative community to take some control back."—Cary Pepper

TEENY, TINY TELEVISION SETS

If you think joggers with Sony Walkmans glued to their ears are taking a risk as they run through traffic, look out for Sony Corporation's latest microtech achievement. In February, Sony began marketing a pocket-size television set in Japan. Battery-operated and fully equipped with headphone and stereo earplugs, the 2-inch screen is in a console only 1¼ inches thick. No date has yet been set for the mini-television's introduction in U.S. stores, but as soon as it's available, there will be no more excuses for not keeping up with "General Hospital."

MONDO VIDEO

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9. *Single Room Furnished*

The only Jayne Mansfield film I have never seen. Even if it's awful, I'd like to own it because it's almost impossible to see anywhere else. Even the Thalia in New York never revives it. Imagine my anticipation of seeing the world's greatest movie star in a self-confessed "serious role" playing not only one but *three* parts (waitress, prostitute, and teenager), in a brown wig yet! Since this was one of Jayne's last roles before her rather spectacular death, one trembles to think of how staggering her performance as a *teenager* must be. Every time I would get depressed at seeing yet another ad for the new Jill Clayburgh masterpiece, I could flick on my machine and see a real movie star at work. Even fans of the "auteur theory" who are not Mansfield maniacs have something to treasure in *Single Room Furnished*: It's an early directorial effort by Matt Cimber, one of Jayne's last husbands and director of the mind-boggling new feature *Butterfly*.

10. *Butterfly*

Although this film is not yet available on cassette, it's a sure bet that it will be soon. Considering the promotion which preceded the film's theatrical opening, I can imagine the announcement of the cassette accompanied by a squadron of airplanes buzzing every American city, pulling two-hundred-foot banners featuring the likeness of its star, the great Pia Zadora. Produced and relentlessly hyped by her producer-mentor-husband, Rik Riklis, this truly unbelievable adaptation of James M. Cain's novel has been getting some of the most gloriously bad reviews in recent memory.

Pia Zadora is my all-time favorite movie star of the last two weeks. Just watching her pout and wiggle, trying to seduce her father (Stacy Keach), is worth the price of ten

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EXPLORATIONS

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But even as the material fact of the film is shoved smack up to the foreground, the eye is irresistibly drawn deep into the frame by both the camera's headlong movement and the classic vanishing point created by the two parallel trolley tracks converging toward infinity. Out of these simple elements, Gehr creates a dizzying play—as forceful as that produced in *Serene Velocity*—between the exaggerated flatness of the image and the depth perspective it represents. One's perception continually rebounds from the surface of the film to that of the street, from 2-D reality to 3-D illusion, and back.

In 1980, Gehr released two more films from the mid-seventies. *Table* (shot in 1976) is the celluloid equivalent of a cubist still life—with an uncanny element of Vermeer as well. The subject is an ordinary kitchen table, a homely clutter of crockery and utensils. For sixteen minutes, Gehr alternates two slightly different fixed points of view, accentuating individual shots through the use of blue or red filters (and sometimes no filter at all). This simple, if painstaking, procedure transforms the image into a stuttering, hypnotic shuffle. Some objects appear simultaneously in two positions; others flex their shimmering forms or collide with their neighbors, while a few barely move at all.

Along with *Table*, Gehr premiered *Shift* (a film he had worked on between 1972 and 1974). For Gehr, *Shift* broke new ground—hence, perhaps, a pun in its title. The film is his first to employ extensive montage; virtually all of his earlier works were created through the application of predetermined shooting systems and thus edited in the camera. *Table* is pure visceral sensation; *Shift* is more dramatic. The actors, however, are all mechanical—a series of cars and trucks filmed from a height of several stories as they perform on a three-lane city street. Gehr isolates one or two vehicles at a time, inverting some shots, so that a car hangs from the asphalt like a bat from a rafter, using angles so severe the traffic often seems to be sliding off the earth, and employing a reverse motion so abrupt that the players frequently exit the scene as though yanked from a stage by the proverbial hook.

A sparse score of traffic noises, obviously culled from a record of sound effects, accompanies the spastic ballet *mécanique*. Not only the action but Gehr's deliberate camera movements are synced to the music of honking horns, screeching brakes, and

grinding gears. The eight-minute film is structured as a series of obliquely comic blackout sketches: Trucks run over their shadows; cars unexpectedly reverse direction or start up and go nowhere.

Early this year, Gehr released two more films (both completed in 1981). One harked back to his earlier work; the second consolidated the territory staked out in *Shift*. For the first—a ten-minute piece Gehr has tentatively titled "Mirage"—the filmmaker replaced the lens of his Bolex with a semicircular piece of plastic found in a Canal Street junk bin and filmed whatever came to hand around his apartment. The resulting footage is surely the most disorienting negation of Renaissance perspective afforded by any film since *History*.

"Mirage's" imagery alternately suggests a bizarrely striated sunset, a train rushing by at superhigh speed, and the textures of a highway as shot from the muffler's point of view on a truck doing seventy m.p.h. Colors ebb and flow; the bands of light change their ratio or intensity, and—most peculiarly—appear to slide in front of, or behind, each other. Although it's impossible to tell what causes these shifts, much of the film's beauty derives from the knowledge that its patterns are logical, determined by the physical properties of Gehr's substitute lens.

Even more impressive is Gehr's second new film, yet to be titled. The movie is his most formally complex work since *Still*. Again, the subject is the urban landscape, but here—for the first time in Gehr's oeuvre—the city's human inhabitants take center stage. The film is a half-hour series of brief close-ups of people on the street, shot from a high, but still intimate, angle, as though Gehr were working out of a first-story window or from a tenement stoop. In a constant interplay of figure and ground, the film shows fragments of feet, heads, hands, and elbows against the backdrop of an ancient sidewalk. None of Gehr's subjects ever acknowledge the camera, and he periodically blurs the focus to emphasize their shapes.

The film is fast on the eye, with many staccato camera moves. But, partially because the people in it are bundled up in winter clothes, one experiences it as a succession of cushioned jolts—the collision of soft, bulky forces that (even more than the steel-and-chrome vectors of *Shift*) enter the frame from all directions. There is, however, too much raw human interest in the footage for the film to ever become completely abstract.

Although Gehr is purposefully vague about his specific locations, the film is obviously set on a shopping street in a neighborhood heavily populated by elderly Eastern European immigrants—a sort of asphalt shtetl. Gehr's subjects use their hands a lot, and these expressive, vulnerable, fleshy sensors take on a life of their own. In one sense, the film is a jagged symphony composed of the most transitory gestures. In another, the film is an exercise in Hals-like portraiture in which an entire character is evoked through isolated details (the back of a neck, a pair of swollen ankles, the angle of a hat).

What lifts the film beyond the descriptive are Gehr's editing strategies. At times he employs crosscutting to create imaginary interactions, or uses shock cuts—in which his subjects saw the air like magicians to conjure the next shot. Like *Shift*, the film is not without humor. In the most describable of Gehr's visual jokes, an image of a woman in sunglasses is replaced—at roughly the same spot in the frame—by a startling, high-angle view of another woman wearing her sunglasses on her head. (This is the closest anyone ever comes to making eye contact with the camera.)

Most frequently, Gehr practices a kind of visual rhyming, in which different subjects of similar shapes "complete" each other's movements over the course of several shots. At times, this match cutting produces a heady, spiral rotation of human forms around an empty patch of weathered pavement. Elsewhere, the persistence of afterimages creates a slightly uneven montage (unique in my experience) wherein some portions of the image seem to change a split second before others do.

Despite its restricted subject matter, it's difficult to consider Gehr's latest film as "minimal." There's no shortage of visual information here. The movie, in fact, is so dense that it's unlikely anyone will ever see it the same way twice. After three viewings, I have just begun to come to terms with its complicated rhythms and understated sight gags. Working with neither the recognition nor remuneration given Hollywood directors and successful Soho painters, Ernie Gehr is among the most powerful and original visual artists in America today. ■

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The films of Ernie Gehr are distributed by the Film-makers' Cooperative, 175 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.

Mark Rydell

The director of *On Golden Pond* talks about working with Katharine Hepburn, Marsha Mason, and Bette Midler.

I always knew I wanted to be a director," says Mark Rydell, director of the hugely successful *On Golden Pond* (a box-office triumph and winner of three Oscars—best actor, best actress, and best screenplay adaptation). Rydell started out in the fifties as an actor; he frequently appeared on Broadway, had a six-year run on the soap opera "As the World Turns" (as Jeff Baker, runaway hero), and was featured in Don Siegel's *Crime in the Streets*.

But, as Rydell once told an interviewer, moving from acting to directing is as natural as moving from childhood to adulthood—"I always felt more comfortable in the directing department, because everything is pretty much in your hands."

Rydell began his directing career in television, with shows like "Ben Casey," "I Spy," and "Gunsmoke," and made his movie debut in 1968 with *The Fox*, based on the D.H. Lawrence novella and starring Sandy Dennis and Keir Dullea. He and Sydney Pollack formed Sanford Productions (named after their acting teacher, Sanford Meisner) and together produced *Scarecrow*, *The Cowboys*, *Cinderella Liberty*, and *Jeremiah Johnson*.

Rydell, who is forty-eight, hasn't acted in years, but he's not entirely immune to temptation. Pollack recently offered him a plum role in his new movie. Rydell agonized and finally said no. He's too busy directing.

Question: How did you bring it all together for *On Golden Pond*?

Mark Rydell: I don't know if you ever saw the play. It was originally produced in New



York, with some very fine actors who were perhaps twenty years too young for the parts. The play was a rather light piece. But once I had Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn, it permitted me to guide the playwright, who did, in my estimation, a remarkable job in turning his play into a screenplay. Not only in the conventional ways of opening it up—that's the easiest thing, which everybody always talks about—but, more important, in deepening the material and investigating with real perception the very resonant issues in the screenplay.

Once it became clear that it was Fonda and Hepburn, it permitted a very serious examination of the twilight years, of what

it means to face ultimate questions—because Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn both have been in the grip of those problems for many years. We were able to really take a peek at this material more seriously, more genuinely.

Question: And the location?

Rydell: I wanted to find an almost mythical lake. A truly golden pond, a lake out of reality, somehow. That's why you don't see anybody in the picture but them—and there's my son, by the way, who plays a marina gas station attendant who mocks Henry Fonda about his age. But you don't really see anybody else. Nobody's there. You forget that because you get very absorbed in the relationships between these people.

My first choice for cameraman was Vilmos Zsigmond, who couldn't get out of another obligation. We had worked together on *Cinderella Liberty* and *The Rose*. I wanted him because he has a sense of poetry in his cinematography that matters to me. I felt there was a lot of poetry in this material, that this was almost like a Bergman piece, but less grim—it had a real American sense of humor in it. But it had four or five people coming to an island, just like a Bergman film, and unpacking emotional baggage.

Vilmos led me to Billy Williams. We met and got along very well. We had a very good intimate evening together. We discussed the material; we decided to go on a location trip together. You know, it was like lovers meeting, in an odd way—it's a very intimate relationship, the relationship with a cameraman. We had sent out people to look for locations—for this mythical pond. I wanted to find a place where the

An inquiry into the arts and crafts of filmmaking through interview seminars between Fellows and prominent filmmakers held under the auspices of The American Film Institute's Center for Advanced Film Studies.

light was right, where we were facing north so that I could have the sun moving throughout the day, where there was no populace. We needed a sense of isolation.

Some very sensitive people found this wonderful lake, which is one of the last remaining preserved lakes, called Squam Lake, in New Hampshire. It's fabulous. It takes your breath away. No houses are exposed. There's no commercialization at all. It added a kind of dignity to the film to have this kind of isolated and respected area. Billy Williams and I went to that lake with Stephen Grimes, a great production designer. We took our 35mm cameras and for a week we shot still pictures of the lake, the trails. He photographed the things we thought were attractive. Then we compared what we shot and began to see what mattered and what didn't matter.

Question: What problems were there in getting financing?

Rydell: *On Golden Pond* is really a testimonial to the tenacity of Jane Fonda. She bought that play as a gift for her father. She literally wanted to give him the great role of his life as a gift. Then they decided they would come to me to guide them, and they also came with the idea of Hepburn—which was an unassailably perfect idea. She responded, and we tried to get the picture on. The picture was resisted by every major studio: "It's uncommercial." "Who's going to see a picture about old people and death?" "It's too depressing." They're the shallow reasons of a certain kind of executive mentality—the kind of people who make pictures according to market-research reports. That's never the way to make a film. It's always some individual filmmaker's passion that takes the material resisted by the studios and finally gets those pictures made.

If you named all of the pictures that you liked in the past ten years, chances are nine out of ten of them would be pictures that languished for years and were resisted. It's always those pictures that break new ground that are the ones embraced by audiences. It's not imitations that are embraced. There will be, I'm sure, a plethora of imitations of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. I dread to think how many imitations there will be, probably, of *Golden Pond*. And an imitation is by nature less than the original.

It was tough to get the money to make the picture. Nobody believed in it except the people involved in the making of it. We never had a moment's doubt that we were involved in something historic. I knew it from the day we began. I knew the minute I laid eyes on Katharine Hepburn, when she came to my house and started to talk

about the material and I saw this luminous, incredible human being. Discussing values with her—what a joy! What a privilege. To go over every beat of the material with Katharine Hepburn was staggering; the same was true of working with Henry Fonda.

It's working with the absolute, ultimate, quintessential virtuosos of their craft. Who is going to be better than they are? If you wanted to elect the grandparents of the world, you'd elect Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn. So we were aware from the beginning that we had something special. But nobody knew it would have the kind of audience it's proved to have.

I think there's something very important being said to filmmakers and to studios by the enormous grosses of pictures like *Golden Pond* and *Ordinary People* and *Kramer vs. Kramer*. It's as if the audiences are screaming against a certain kind of pursuit of the adolescent dollar by movie companies, which are making movies about hardware. The world is in such a state of decay that everybody is starved to believe in something. You're looking at a guy who is not a cynic. I loathe cynicism, and I try to make pictures that affirm.

Question: How do you deal with different talents? I've heard, for example, that Bette Midler was difficult to work with on *The Rose*.

Rydell: I never had a moment of trouble with Bette Midler. Not a moment. I'm an actor and I've been teaching acting for about twenty-five years. I'm an executive

director of the Actors Studio here in Los Angeles, along with Sydney Pollack. I have a very high regard for the actor as the crucial element in filmmaking. I'm fond of saying to my crew, at the beginning of work: "All we are is a very sophisticated recording device whose job is to record an event that has to be created by the actors. No matter how brilliantly you record something, if the event stinks, then you have a brilliant recording of a lousy event." So the crucial element is the actor, and I give a lot of attention to the actor.

I find that acting is one of the bravest professions of all. An actor has to remain vulnerable. The entire process of learning to act necessitates a kind of peeling away of layers of insulation that we develop from the time we're children, when we were innocent and exposed. The actor has to sandpaper his feelings and his vulnerabilities. He has to be open to assault from circumstances, events, relationships.

I suspect that any time you see a great performance, it's because some actor has been courageous enough to allow you to peek at a very personal, private secret of his. So you have to create a very safe environment for the actor. I'm used to working a particular way, but it would be foolish for me to force actors into working my way if they're not conditioned to work that way. The important thing is that we get there; I don't care how we get there.

Question: I'm interested in the music in *The Rose*. What influence did you have on Midler?

Katharine Hepburn serves fish to Henry Fonda in On Golden Pond, a film which Jane Fonda produced in order to give her father "the great role of his life."



It's difficult to lead Katharine Hepburn—to face her and say, “You’re going to do what I have in mind, Miss Hepburn.”

Rydell: I kept pushing her more and more toward narrative songs because I recognized her as an actress. I kept pushing her toward songs which she didn't want to sing. She didn't want to sing “When a Man Loves a Woman.” She didn't want to sing it. She didn't want to sing that very difficult song that she does near the end, “Stay With Me, Baby.” The more I pushed her and the more we got into the depth of some of the songs that I wanted, the more the pain of that character began to emerge.

Bette Midler has talent like an open wound. You just throw a little salt on it and it responds. She's really got an incredible sense of truth and an ability to dig into the heart of material. She used to beg me not to point her in certain directions in the material. She knew I was going to tell her something about her character's father or her early life, and that she was going to have to deal with it. She doesn't pretend to have an experience—or what is commonly called in acting “indicate.” She doesn't give you an impression of the experience; she *has* the experience. She really goes for the jugular. One of the first things I told her about the part, which mobilized her for the whole distance, was that her charac-

ter's parents never touched her. I said, “Your parents have never touched you. You've never gotten enough, and as a result you're starving. You drink, you put pills in your mouth, you sing for applause, and you cannot fill up a bottomless pit.” Then I walked away from her. I knew I'd planted a seed that would work for the whole part, and it did. She knew exactly what it meant never to be touched.

Question: What happens when you get a performer you have trouble with?

Rydell: It's a terrible experience. I've had it only once, and I just outlasted him. That was Steve McQueen in *The Reivers*. Steve was a very difficult guy. He had a very troubled childhood; he spent a lot of time in juvenile homes. I knew him in New York when he was trying to decide whether he should be a tile setter or an actor. “What do you think? Do you think I ought to make bathrooms, or do you think I ought to go to the Neighborhood Playhouse?” He became an actor because a girl he was with was going to the Neighborhood Playhouse—and it was more convenient than tile setting. Now it did finally engage him. He became very good at what he did—very visceral, with a sense of craft, real under-

standing, real talent. But he never shook his beginnings and his fear that everybody was out to get him. He was a very distrustful man, a very competitive guy.

In *The Reivers* he played opposite a six-foot-five black guy, Rupert Crosse, who died of lung cancer very shortly after we made the picture. Rupert got an Oscar nomination for his part. But it was very tough for me to get Steve to accept this guy at all. Steve was very concerned. He didn't want anybody around looking bigger than he was. I had to con him into it. They had read together and had kind of gotten along, and we finally cast Rupert. That took a lot of pushing because Steve didn't want him. He wanted some little guy.

Rupert was a string bean of a guy and terrifically talented and nobody's patsy; he was a militant fighter against the inequity with which we have treated blacks. I said to Steve, “Come on, give a little party for Rupert. Welcome him into the company.” Rupert had never had a big job like that—a leading role, hand-to-hand combat with Steve McQueen. It's everything that an actor dreams about. Steve said, “Yeah, OK. I'll invite him to the house.”

Steve at that time lived in the hills of Bel Air—a quarter-of-a-mile driveway, stone mansion, gates, seven garages, a full gym out in the back. I arrived with Rupert, who was looking around. He had never seen anything like it. There were only about eight of us; we were talking and having drinks. Steve was very big on jiten-do; it's a form of martial arts. His closest friend was Bruce Lee, who was with us all during the picture. Bruce used to work out with him every day; this was before Bruce became a star. Steve was first class, and he started to talk about it and did a little something.

Rupert's sitting there and says, “You're off balance.” Steve goes, “What?” Rupert says, “You're off balance. You could be knocked down.” Well, to embarrass Steve in front of a group was, first of all, wrong. I'm trying to get to Rupert. I'm pulling his pants. I say, “That's all right. It's not so off balance.” Rupert says, “He could be knocked down.” Steve says, “Oh? Why don't you show me.” I'm thinking, Here goes the picture. I feel like it's out the window. And Rupert unwound like a praying mantis and stood up to his full six feet five—skinny, maybe a hundred and sixty

Rydell pushed Bette Midler toward narrative songs in The Rose, based on Janis Joplin's life. Midler resisted, but Rydell says, “I recognized her as an actress.”



pounds. Steve went "pah-toong" and Rupert went "pah-dah-toong" and Steve was over and down three steps, under a pool table. It turned out Rupert had a black belt in karate. Steve came up, white with embarrassment. He walked over to Rupert and shook his hand. They started to shake and suddenly they were almost arm wrestling. We used it throughout the film—every time they'd shake hands.

Steve was difficult. He had me on the ropes. I've dealt with some major, tough actors. Nobody's had me on the ropes. Steve had me on the ropes. But I hung in there. I told him I was going to outlast him. I said, "When you're furious with me, I'm still going to be here trying. I'm not going to fold. And I'm not going to give in to you, because you're wrong. You're going to have to fire me." It just drove him crazy, but he finally did surrender.

Question: Do you undergo any anxieties in directing a film?

Rydell: They're constant. It does get easier. But I still wake up in a cold sweat in the middle of the night staring with my eyes ablaze. I'm thinking, How did I ever get myself into this? How am I ever going to solve this? I think there's a certain kind of healthy anxiety, that is to say, realistic anxiety. It is realistically difficult to make

a movie. It is realistically difficult to lead Katharine Hepburn—to face her and say, "You're going to do what I have in mind, Miss Hepburn." It takes a lot of courage and a lot of strength and a lot of tenacity and a lot of affection to lead.

Question: How did *Cinderella Liberty* come about?

Rydell: That was a book that was submitted to me by Fox. If I would make it, they would buy the book. The book was very sprawling, seven hundred, eight hundred pages about bureaucracy. There's a small section which has to do with this sailor, and this whore, and her black son—which I liked. I thought we could make a movie about that. It seemed to reflect something in me that I wanted to affirm about tenacity and commitment.

Here was a situation where a man of, let's say, forty, who has had enough time in the navy, is beginning to hunger for a family. He picks a very unlikely person with whom to connect—a prostitute who's pregnant and who also has a son from someone of another color. An unlikely family choice. But the powers of his commitment and of his connection lifts her. It attracted me that he lifts her, that he elevates her, that he can change things.

I met with the author, Darryl Ponicsan,

and I told him that I wanted to make his book into a movie, but that I only wanted to make this part of it. "You have to decide whether you want to do that," I said, "because that's where I want to focus my attention." He saw what I wanted to do, and he saw that it was an honorable effort to investigate that aspect of his book. He was willing to do it. We went through literally nine drafts of the screenplay.

Many actresses wanted to play the part of the prostitute. But Paul Mazursky had just made a film, *Blume in Love*, with Susan Anspach. I called Mazursky and said, "Listen, I know you're still cutting. Show me some dailies, will you please? I really want to see Susan Anspach." I go over, and I'm watching, and see in the background this girl, Marsha Mason. She played a very small part. There was something that really struck me about her. I said, "Who is that?" He said, "Some girl I found in New York. She's very talented."

I tracked her down and found out she was in the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. Unannounced, I went up there and got a couple of tickets to watch her play Nora in *A Doll's House*. She was spectacular. She blew my mind. I went back and introduced myself and I told her, "Listen, I'm Mark Rydell. I make movies.

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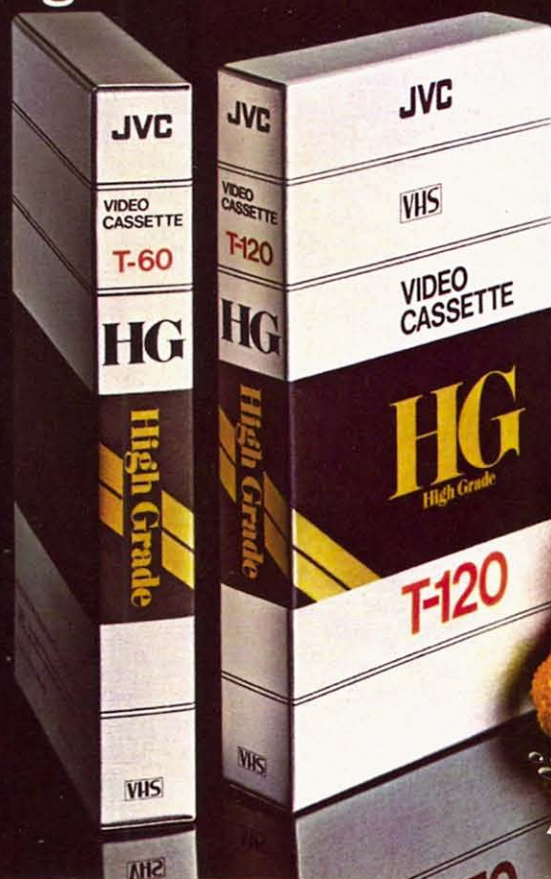
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I'm about to make a movie called *Cinderella Liberty* with Jimmy Caan, and I'd like you to play the lead." She thought I was a maser. She didn't believe who I was. I stayed two days to convince her.

The studio said, "Absolutely not. How can you possibly talk about casting an unknown in this great role? We can get Jane Fonda, we can get Faye Dunaway, we can get anybody to play the part." I just hung in and hung in and hung in. They cut my budget in half. They did everything they could to deter me. When they saw that I was not to be deterred, they gave in. The week after they started to see the dailies, they sent me a wire saying that if they had their choice of anyone in the world for the part, they would choose her now. She was ripe. I knew it when I met her. All she needed was a chance.

Question: What leads you to pick the subjects you do?

Rydell: I'm always looking for material that's just as good ten years from now as it is today. I'm not interested in the topical. I'm interested in resonant material that moves me. I know that I have equipment which is best used in material that has real deep, profound emotion. *On Golden Pond* is a kind of inescapable picture. It's confounding even cynics.

There's a coterie of cynics who want to make fun of the film, a common characteristic of those who resist being moved. They want to retain a kind of objectivity. They don't want to be grabbed and taken so that they lose their "ability" to make judgments. If they can remain aloof and make a judgment, they feel more comfortable. I think those people are being robbed of life and experience—and are lousy critics, too. To me, art is no good unless it moves you. There are some critics who resent the picture. They were moved and hate the fact that they were moved. They were grabbed and they accuse me of being manipulative.

Generally speaking, I find that the people who resist my work are people who resist feelings. I love feelings. I think they're the raw material of art. When you can move somebody, when you're not reaching through their heads, but you're kind of reaching at them through their viscera—that's the material I look for. It's a constant process of reading and exposing yourself to something whose values are going to really engage you deeply. If it doesn't engage you deeply, you'll never be able to lead for two years—because it takes two years. To lead with enthusiasm for two years, you'd better be in love.

Question: You worked in television years ago. How was it for you?



An offscreen encounter inspired Steve McQueen and Rupert Crosse when they tangled in *The Reivers*.

Rydell: Television was terrific for me. When I was a television director in the sixties, it was great. While the pressures were enormous in those days, there was much less interference from networks and from advertisers than there is today. I remember when I was an actor in the fifties, during the live days of "Goodyear Playhouse" and "Philco Television Playhouse" and "Playhouse 90," and all the directors that I'm sure many of you admire—Arthur Penn, Sidney Lumet—were directing live television. There was a sense of enthusiasm, and the same sense of enthusiasm existed in the sixties in episodic television. Even the "Gunsmokes" were done with deep passion.

I remember that in order to prevent myself from being cynical, and from being disgusted with the mediocre kind of material that I had to deal with every week, I had to find something in it I loved. I treated every single television show as if it would be my last chance to direct. So I didn't allow myself to become mediocrized, because television is often the home of the passionately mediocre. It was great for me because I really learned how to use my tools, and I learned how to work with crews.

Question: You mentioned your acting days. After years of directing, what made you decide to return to acting, in Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye*?

Rydell: Playing Marty Augustine was a great bit of fun for me. Bob sent me the script; he wanted me to play that part. It just happened to work out right. It was a

terrific thing for me. I think that a director should act every once in a while to remind himself of how difficult it really is. I had a great time playing that part.

I think the fact that I already had an established career and that not everything was at stake freed me of certain anxieties in the performance of that role, and allowed me to do it perhaps better than I might have had I only been an actor. Then I would have been so nervous that this was the most important... you know. Bob is a brilliant director and made room for me. One of the things that he knows best is how to pick the right elements and throw them into the stew and light the fire under the pot. He lets them bubble and boil. He was very enthused with my work. He was very supportive.

Oddly enough, I've just turned down a leading role in a picture. One of my closest friends is Sydney Pollack, and he is about to make a picture with Dustin Hoffman called *Tootsie*. He offered me an eight-week leading role, and I can't do it. I'm too busy. It's funny, everything comes too late. If this had come fifteen years ago, I would have killed to do it.

Question: What are you busy with?

Rydell: I'm in a terrific position at the moment. I've developed two screenplays, both of which are completed and have been given a green light by the studio. So I'm in a position where I can choose the one with which to go forward. They're both terrific pieces of material. One is based on the play *Nuts*, which is successfully being performed here in Los Angeles. I've been working with the writer of the play, Tom Topor, who's a *New York Post* journalist. Then I have a screenplay based on an Evan Hunter novel called *Love, Dad* that is just spectacular. So I'm in this very enviable position. I'm at the peak of my popularity and my powers and they've given me a green light on two pictures. My work is cut out for me. ■

The Films of Mark Rydell

The Fox — Claridge Pictures — 1968.

The Reivers — National General Pictures — 1969.

The Cowboys — Warner Bros. — 1972 — also producer.

Cinderella Liberty — Twentieth Century-Fox — 1973 — also producer.

Harry and Walter Go to New York — Columbia — 1976.

The Rose — Twentieth Century-Fox — 1979.

On Golden Pond — Universal — 1981.

The Movie of 'Tomorrow'



Annie

Columbia Pictures presents a Ray Stark production a John Huston film

ANNIE Starring **ALBERT FINNEY** **CAROL BURNETT** **BERNADETTE PETERS** **ANN REINKING** **TIM CURRY** **GEOFFREY HOLDER** **EDWARD HERRMANN** as "F.D.R."
SANDY as Himself and Introducing **AILEEN QUINN** as "Annie" Executive Producer **JOE LAYTON** Choreography by **ARLENE PHILLIPS** Music Adapted by **RALPH BURNS** Production Executive **HOWARD PINE** Supervising Editor **MARGARET BOOTH, A.C.E.**
 Director of Photography **RICHARD MOORE, A.S.C.** Music by **CHARLES STROUSE** Lyrics by **MARTIN CHARNIN** Screenplay by **CAROL SOBIESKI** Produced by **RAY STARK** Directed by **JOHN HUSTON**

The stage play "Annie" was originally presented on the New York Stage by Mike Nichols. Produced on the New York Stage by Irwin Meyer, Stephen R. Friedman and Lewis Allen.

PG PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED
 SOME MATERIAL MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR CHILDREN

DOLBY STEREO
 IN SELECTED THEATRES

Book of the stage play by **THOMAS MEEHAN**

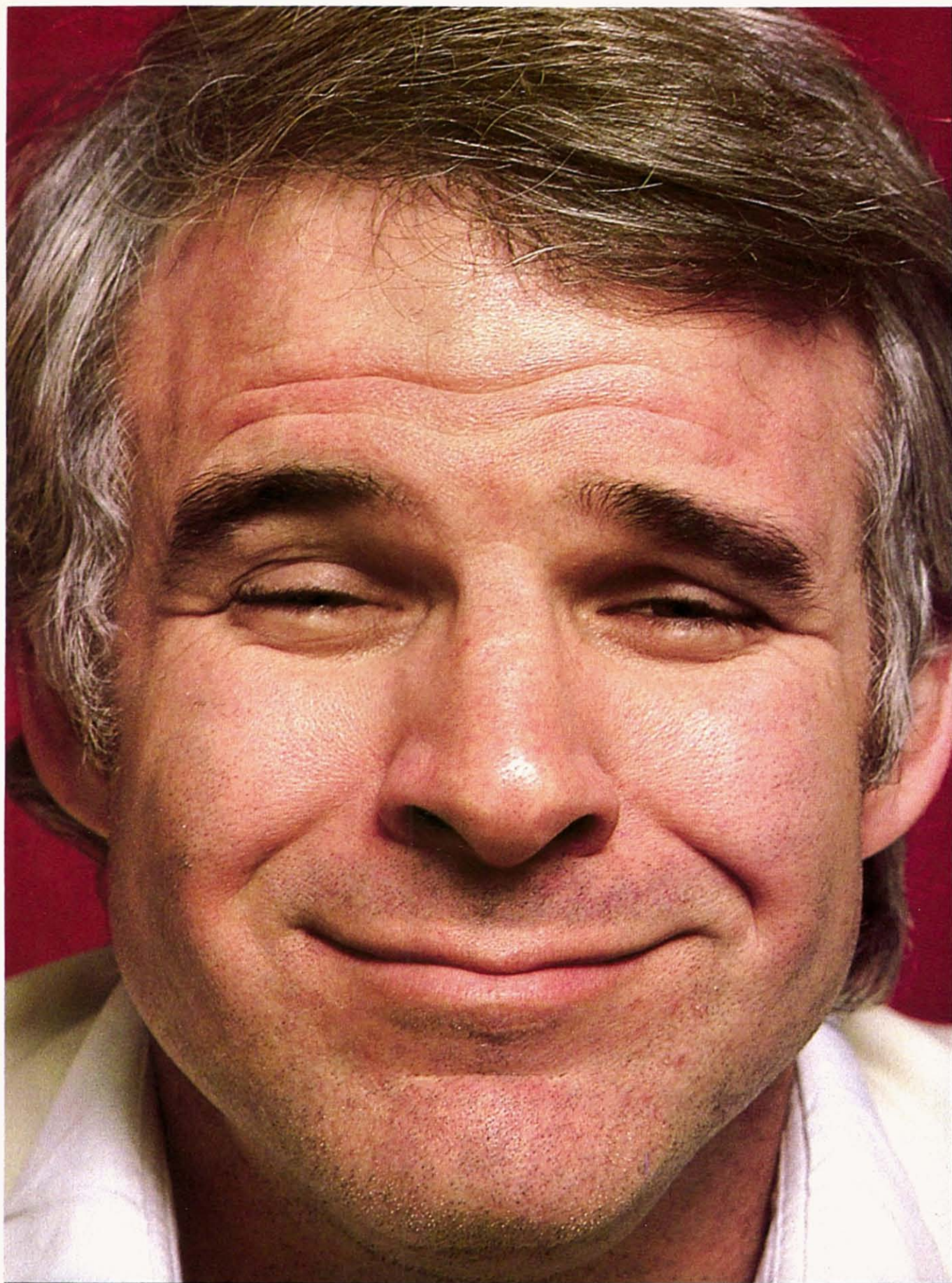
Music of the stage play by **CHARLES STROUSE** Lyrics of the stage play by **MARTIN CHARNIN**

FROM **RASTAR**



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COMING THIS SUMMER



Lynn Goldsmith/LGI © 1981

After making only pennies from heaven, Steve Martin is counting on dollars from film noir.

Ben Fong-Torres

Why Is This Man Smirking?

It's a love scene. You can tell by the throbbing music. Steve Martin, private eye, has just impressed his beautiful female client with his quick thinking.

"I'm impressed," she says. "Think *that's* impressive," Martin says with a shrug. He inserts a cigarette into his ear and pulls it out of his mouth. The client is charmed; she's beginning to feel something for this laconic lug. But Martin is confused.

There I was, standing like a kid doing corny tricks for her. . . . Why?

Martin could also be wondering what movie he is in. It could be *The Jerk*, essentially Steve Martin, the wild and crazy comic, transferred to film. It could be *Pennies From Heaven*, with Martin in the dramatic role of Arthur Parker, luckless song-sheet salesman.

But this is *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*, Martin's third feature film, and his third strange one in a row. In *Dead Men*, Martin is Rigby Reardon, a detective in forties Los Angeles. A woman comes to him, wants him to help solve a murder. She falls for him. He resists, being a believer in the old Philip Marlowe dictum stitched on a sampler on his wall: "Guns Don't Kill Detectives, Love Does." But by movie's end, they're in each other's arms.

If this sounds like all the old Bogart-Marlowe movies, the coincidence is intentional. *Dead Men* is part spoof, part affectionate tribute to the black-and-white world of film noir. Steve Martin's co-stars in this unique film include Bogart himself, Alan Ladd, Charles Laughton, Joan Crawford, Veronica Lake, James Cagney, Kirk Douglas, Ingrid Bergman, Barbara Stanwyck, Ava Gardner, Bette Davis, Lana Turner, Burt Lancaster, Vincent Price, Ray Milland, and Cary Grant.

Through clips from their films, ranging

from *Suspicion* (1941) to *White Heat* (1949), these old stars become fresh characters in a new whodunit, and they play scenes with current actors like Martin, Rachel Ward, Carl Reiner (who also co-wrote and directed), and Reni Santoni. In most cases, there's no complicated trick to weaving movies from another era with current footage. *Dead Men* was shot in black and white (by Michael Chapman, who also photographed *Raging Bull*), and Martin's conversations with his co-stars were often done in the alternating-close-ups style of film noir. Where necessary, a stand-in, seen from the rear, was used. And in the few shots where Martin shares the screen with a full view of an old star, it's a matter of Martin's being shot with the earlier film projected on a rear screen, so that, for instance, he seems to be in the same railroad coach as Cary Grant.

Private eye Martin hires his mentor, Bogart, to help crack the case. He pays off an alcoholic Ray Milland (from *The Lost Weekend*) for a vital clue. He gets shot by, among others, Alan Ladd (*This Gun for Hire*) and James Cagney (*White Heat*); he strangles, among others, Bette Davis (*Deception*); and he chases Vincent Price through the fireworks finale of *The Bribe*.

The film's title is based on a scene with Lauren Bacall from *Dark Passage*. In the *Dead Men* script, Martin's character explains, "She's got information for me, so she takes me to her apartment, and she's wearing this big plaid blouse. Her apartment's got this plaid closet, and inside are 150 plaid dresses. I say, 'What's with all the plaid?' and she says, 'When I get excited about something, I give it all I have.' I say, 'But plaid wardrobe, plaid closet, plaid shoes. . . .'" Here, the detective pauses and lowers his voice. "'Plaid underwear?' And she says, 'I'm funny that way.' And I say, 'Good, it may save your life.

'Cause dead men don't wear plaid.'" (Unfortunately, the scene wound up on the cutting-room floor, and the title is only alluded to late in the film by Martin in a voice-over.)

The idea of using old clips isn't overused at the expense of a story. Martin and his co-star, Rachel Ward, who made a strong impression last year in *Sharky's Machine*, make an attractive and believable couple—even if she does win him over chiefly through her ability to suck bullets out of his arm.

At screenings in Santa Barbara and San Diego earlier this year, audiences seemed to agree. *Dead Men* got lots of laughs, and Martin, seated in the audience alongside Carl Reiner, relaxed. "I felt like nudging Carl," he says, "and saying, 'We're so smart.' It was just a good feeling. I hadn't done anything funny for almost two years. I felt in contact with the audience again. It was good to see them laughing, really laughing, and to have these crazy thoughts we'd had in isolation borne out in front of an audience."

Martin needed a good laugh right about then. He had taken a big gamble last year with *Pennies From Heaven*, Herbert Ross's zigzag mix of dark tragedy and bright musical numbers. As the film shifted back and forth between real life and daydreams, sets would change and dramatic characters would become singers and dancers, lip synching to actual recordings from the Depression era. Although critics unanimously agreed that *Pennies* was daring and unconventional, both Martin and the film got mixed reviews, and it made only pennies at the box office.

Martin wasn't surprised. Before its release, he was saying, "This is a movie that . . . people will hate, people will love." When he went on the "Today" show to plug the film, he told Gene Shalit that

Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid was his "ace in the hole, a comedy waiting in the wings in case *Pennies* doesn't make it."

Asked now about *Pennies*, he's hesitant to talk. "I don't even have an opinion," he says, then ventures: "I think *Pennies* was real sophisticated. And maybe it was bad economic times or something. . . . I don't know what to blame, other than it's me and not a comedy."

In the end, *Pennies* came across to most critics and audiences as too dark, too despairing, and without any redeeming characters. To that charge, Martin does a facial shrug. "It'll take me two years to look back and get a perspective," he says. "Saying it's depressing is like saying it's in color, or it's two hours long. It's a fact. So what? And as Dennis Potter [the writer of *Pennies*] points out, the morality of the movie is not found in the characters; it's in the overall picture. There is no very moral person in that movie, just as there isn't in life. You have to look in different places. But I was shocked to see some local movie critics on TV say it was 'dirty.' It was so primitive, that kind of criticism."

Martin seems, on the whole, to take *Pennies* in stride. "The personal and industry response has been fantastic," he says. "I've been offered roles I wouldn't have been considered for before." Recently, he's been talking with Neil Simon about starring in the adaptation of Bruce Jay Friedman's *The Lonely Guy's Book of Life*. "And," he adds, "my price went up."

For Martin, *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* marks a return to comedy, but in its original form it was hardly funny. It was a Martin script called "Depression," which he describes as a "comedy about the economic collapse of the United States." Reiner, the director of *The Jerk*, liked the script, and the two went into rewrites with George Gipe, a Baltimore-based writer of plays, nonfiction books, film novelizations, and a film script that impressed Reiner.

But the rewrites were going nowhere slow, and over lunch one day, someone—nobody remembers who—came up with the idea of splicing old scenes into a new comedy. While Martin went off to work on *Pennies From Heaven*, Gipe and Reiner started screening movies, three or four a day, fifty or sixty in all. "We discovered that the forties detective-genre films were the ones that always had the same sound," says Reiner. "They flowed from one to the other."

Pieces from various films began to fit together. "There'd be the lucky circum-



The wild and crazy private eye of Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid.

stance of seeing one actor in three different pictures looking the same," Reiner says, "or Ava Gardner in two different pictures wearing a dress that was so similar, one in *The Bribe* and one in *The Killers*. Then people calling other people by name—we found 'Rigby' in one picture and 'Reardon' in another."

David Picker, who coproduced *Dead Men* with Martin's manager, William McEuen, picked the rest of the technical group. "What seemed the logical thing to do," Picker says, "was to get the craftsmen who made the original movies. Thus, Edith Head, who had done five or six of them. [*Dead Men* was the costume designer's last film.] John DeCuir had designed certain of them. And music—Miklos Rozsa had scored four or five."

Looking for pieces of an old set at the Laird studios (former home of Selznick International), DeCuir stumbled across the train compartment from *Suspicion*, resulting in the scene in which Martin and a dapper young Cary Grant knock knees. Other sets, props, and costumes had to be duplicated, and because of the need to recreate rooms from a dozen different films, *Dead Men* required some ninety sets, perhaps three times the average. And, finally, *Dead Men*'s music had to be meticulously scored to incorporate music that existed on the old movies and couldn't be erased. Still, shooting was accomplished in fifty days. "And in terms of budget," says Picker, "it's below today's average. It's barely over eight million dollars, which is a bargain."

Once deals were made to acquire the desired footage, Martin and company had the freedom to take liberties with the old scenes and dialogue. They could easily

have done more than make a funny movie; they could have made fun of film noir. And they were tempted. "When we first looked at it," says Reiner, "we got ourselves interested by making wild jokes at what they were saying. Then we realized those jokes were making us laugh, but we were being very cruel to the original stars."

The most obvious target was Bogart. A year ago, before postproduction began on *Dead Men*, Martin described his character this way: "I'm a detective. Humphrey Bogart taught me everything I know, and I'm so good I've surpassed him. He starts to slip, and I have to let him have it."

In the final version, Bogart does look a little down and out—Martin has to keep pestering him to wear a necktie—but another scene, in which Martin fires him, was cut. "It was funny, but also sad," Reiner says, "because he became a character in the picture, and we didn't feel the audience reacting positively to ripping at Bogart. Now, he's the one who solves the case."

Is Steve Martin going out on a limb with *Dead Men*, as he did with *Pennies*? He doesn't think so. "*Dead Men* is more accessible. It has a good commercial chance, where *Pennies From Heaven* was always iffy." What made the failure of *Pennies* initially such a difficult experience for Martin was that it broke a long winning streak for him. *The Jerk*, which cost \$4.5 million to make, took in \$43 million in rentals, which put it in the top fifty among all-time rental champions. His albums were almost always million sellers; a book, *Cruel Shoes*, hit the top of the best-seller lists; he was a longtime guest on television talk shows and a frequent guest host on "Saturday Night Live" and "The Tonight Show." His concert audiences had grown to rock-superstar sizes of twenty-five thousand, attended by many fans who even dressed like him, in white suits topped by fake arrows through the head or bunny ears, and who yelled the silly phrases he'd made famous, most often "Ex-cuuuuuuuuuse me!"

Although Martin had been doing his act—a combination of magic, juggling, banjo playing, sight gags, and non sequiturs (inspired by philosophy courses in college)—since the late sixties, in the aftermath of Watergate it somehow all caught on. Martin wasn't ethnic, like Richard Pryor or Freddie Prinze; he wasn't an intellectual social critic, like Lily Tomlin or David Steinberg; he wasn't dopest, like George Carlin or Cheech and Chong. He was a straight-looking WASP who made funny faces or balloon animals one minute, portrayed a smug continental "love god"

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the next, and wrapped it up with a serious banjo piece, finally inviting the entire audience to a nearby McDonald's for an order of three hundred hamburgers and one fry. "And all we were trying to do," says Bill McEuen innocently, "was be as big and popular as the Who, the Dead, and the Stones."

McEuen and Martin had been dreaming like that since the late sixties. McEuen was a frustrated blues guitarist, a USC film school dropout who had turned talent manager. Martin was a shy guy from Orange County who caught show biz fever as a kid selling guidebooks at Disneyland, wanted

Martin did
feel hostility
from critics
after *The
Jerk*. "No
one likes an
upstart."

to be in the movies, and got onstage with his mixed-bag comedy act, playing various folk clubs around Southern California.

Martin remembers that McEuen rented an office on Sunset Boulevard to take care of whatever business he could drum up for Martin and three bands. "None of us knew what we were doing," says Martin. "We pretended like we were in the business. But he always believed in me. He said, 'We're gonna do it.' And I was just going"—Martin puts on an awed, whatever-you-say voice—"Great, Bill. Sounds good." McEuen, Martin continues, "had dreams about going in and making a big motion picture deal with a studio, like Woody Allen, or what Jerry Lewis did with Paramount."

McEuen agrees. "I wanted to go into Warner Bros. or any conglomerate and say, 'I have records, movies, books, and other ideas!' I thought if we had a home—one champion—we could do anything. It's everyone's dream to never worry about money, to just do the product. But none of them would do it."

Then along came producer and studio executive David Picker. In 1975, just before he became head of production at Paramount, Picker saw Martin in one of his

early headlining engagements at the Boarding House nightclub in San Francisco, just about the time that the comedian was getting noticed.

"He was totally fresh and new," says Picker. "I found him hysterically funny." When Picker got to Paramount, he signed Martin to a three-picture deal. Then, in the middle of talks about a first film, Picker came up with the idea of Martin doing a short, "to introduce Steve into movie theaters. I thought of Robert Benchley's shorts, which had been running on the Z Channel here. And suddenly here was this sensational short, shot in two days for \$96,000." (The eight-minute film was *The Absent-Minded Waiter*, in which Martin played an air-headed waiter to customers Buck Henry and Teri Garr.)

"The transition was perfect," says McEuen. "It allowed Steve to experiment with being an actor for movies, and it became the opening piece for the concerts. And it became obvious the audience wanted more. I mean, how many movies play to twenty thousand people at one sitting? The response gave us a lot of confidence about features."

Picker left Paramount in 1978, and, he says, the studio's new leadership "decided they didn't want to pursue the relationship with Steve." "They just didn't have a street sense of his career," says McEuen. "They weren't at the Anaheim Convention Center watching ten thousand people watching *The Absent-Minded Waiter*." To which Picker graciously adds: "As a two-time studio head, let me tell you, it's easy to make that mistake."

Martin signed with executive Ned Tanen at Universal, and Picker, by now an independent producer, went to work on *The Jerk*. The film, based loosely on an admission in Martin's routine that he'd been born a poor black child, got mixed reviews at best. Martin isn't above criticizing his first feature, but, on balance, he's fond of it. "Even in its wrongness—or in my wrongness—there was something right. I was acting on intuition. I think it's funnier than a lot of things I've seen, and I think it'll be around a long time."

A sequel, or at least more of *The Jerk* routines, might have seemed in order to capitalize on the film's huge success, but Martin was looking for something different. And he got it with *Pennies From Heaven*. Martin's agent submitted his client's name for the lead in the film to director Herbert Ross, but Ross was familiar with Martin only from his appearances

on "Saturday Night Live." Although MGM, sensing it had a commercially risky project on its hands, was looking to protect itself with a "name" star, Ross decided to check out Martin's stage act anyway.

"I went to Las Vegas and watched two shows," Ross says. "I was really impressed by the acting within the performance. We spent two days together just talking and reading scenes from the script. I came back convinced that, given his desire to play it, he could do it."

"What I saw in Steve," Ross continues, "was his ability to move. He's rhythmic and musical and coordinated, and somehow he's in the tradition that those numbers are in. What I didn't realize was he was able to synthesize that thirties attitude."

Ross has a surprise for those who think Martin's hoofing and singing in *Pennies* was a fluke. "He's literally the only actor in Hollywood equipped to do a musical," says the director of other music- and dance-oriented projects, like *Funny Lady* and *The Turning Point*. "Even Robin Williams, who is trained, hasn't got his technique."

Steve Martin is too big a show business name for one film failure to ruin. Still, he's an uneasy movie star. Just before *Pennies* was released, Bill McEuen was saying, "Steve is seeking legitimacy as an actor. Television negates him. Movies look down on television. *The Jerk* isn't considered a movie by the industry." Martin himself thought he had no problems with "the movie community," but did feel hostility from film critics after *The Jerk*. "It's a battle," he says, "because no one likes an upstart."

People in the industry, Martin says, were impressed with the success of his first film and came running with offers and blank checks. Which only made him wary. He wasn't interested in jumping into a new deal just to get another movie made. "You have to be thoroughly convinced that the project is a good one."

Ironically, the box-office failure of *Pennies* may have strengthened Martin's position. The feeling may be that he's stretched himself by trying something different, something honorable. In a way, he's now paid his dues.

"I think I feel more inclined toward movies now," Martin admits. "I'm not looking for my next college date; I'm looking for my next movie." Is there a long-range plan for Steve Martin and the movies? He and McEuen don't seem to have any specific design. "Just before *The Jerk*," Martin says, "my goal was to make

Continued on page 76

MY *Diner*

WITH BARRY

What happens when a studio astutely backs a modestly budgeted and, not incidentally, very funny comedy—the kind of picture any executive would give up his parking space to have on his release schedule—but still can't figure out how to get people to see it? In the case of MGM, the film is *Diner*, and it almost got away. Early this spring, MGM decided to "test-market" this film about growing up male in Baltimore (circa 1959) in Phoenix, a move one official later admitted "was like testing *Fiddler on the Roof* in Cairo." Worse, an early ad campaign tried to sell it to the *Animal House* crowd, even though the film's humor is generally understated and verbal. There's a lot of food consumed in *Diner*, but there are no food fights. The teenage patrons were disappointed.

Still, MGM didn't give up. "The last

It ain't Wally Shawn
and André Gregory.

It's just a coupla
Baltimore boys sitting
around talking.

thing we want for *Diner*," said another source at the studio, "is for it to end up with UA Classics." MGM screened *Diner* for the New York critics, and it paid off. When it opened in New York, David Denby called it "a small American classic" and Pauline Kael hailed it as "a great period piece." Now the studio's ad campaign has begun to stress the critics' quotes, hoping to attract an older, more literate audience.

Diner has been compared to *Breaking Away*, another film about the joys and sorrows of coming of age and male camaraderie. (The films share a lead—Daniel Stern.) The boys down at the diner are a little older than the *Breaking Away* crowd—all of them are in their early twenties—but they are no less reluctant to take on the responsibilities of adulthood. Their refuge from their jobs, their girl friends, and their wives is the local diner, where they can discuss the merits of Frank Sinatra versus Johnny Mathis over a plate of French fries with gravy, a Baltimore greasy spoon specialty.

Diner is the directing debut of thirty-eight-year-old writer Barry Levinson, who grew up in Baltimore, and recalls his experiences with an equal mixture of affection and regret. His screenwriting credits include... *And Justice for All* (a collabora-

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Writers Bob Ward
and Barry Levinson
share a booth.



tion with his wife, actress Valerie Curtin) and *High Anxiety* and *Silent Movie* (both written with Mel Brooks, Ron Clark, and Rudy DeLuca). Between *Diner's* unsuccessful run in Baltimore and Washington and its New York opening, he met with screenwriter-novelist Robert Ward at Manhattan's Market Diner. Ward, who wrote the Western novel *Cattle Annie and Little Britches*, and co-wrote the screen adaptation, is at work on a novel called *Baltimore* (to be published in March 1983 by Delacorte), and is scheduled to direct his own screenplay for George Romero's Laurel Entertainment later this year. He's the same age as Levinson and also spent his adolescence in Baltimore.

The Market Diner, which Ward describes as looking like "a jukebox with seats instead of records inside," is reminiscent of Baltimore's Hillcrest Diner, the model for the setting of *Diner's* best scenes, in which, as Ward says, "young men learn to sharpen their wits, talk about the mysteries of the opposite sex, and pass time while they wait for the magical day when they will somehow become adults." Here's a record of their conversation.

Bob Ward: I really like this place. It's got the good chrome feel of the old Hillcrest.

Barry Levinson: You hung out there, too? It's funny we never knew one another.

Bob: Well, I actually lived across Baltimore. I came over and hung out with Jewish friends who practically lived in there. Jensky, Barry Fuller, Arnie Cohen. And Boogie. The star of your picture. He had to be modeled after Boogie Weinglas. He was a great fighter. I remember an epic battle between him and a big kid named Tattersall in front of City, our old high school.

Barry: Yeah, I saw Boogie get into a fight one night at a recreation dance. The kid pulled a knife and we were all stunned. Suddenly Boogie looks at the kid and says very coolly, "Hey, what's this, comic books?" The kid was so amazed at this movielike response that he hesitated just long enough for Boogie to knock the knife out of his hands. Very courageous. It's wild you knew him. And Jensky, too. He was like Don Rickles. Fast. He'd hit the diner and put down about fifty guys in two minutes.

Bob: Yeah, he was mean. But lovable. I think you got that in your picture. When I saw it in Washington, people loved it. They were cheering afterwards. I thought it caught that time in Baltimore beautifully.

Barry: Well, I just wish the studio had given us some ads. I mean, there was nothing.



The boys of Barry Levinson's fictional Baltimore diner: Timothy Daly, Mickey Rourke, Daniel Stern, Kevin Bacon, Steve Guttenberg, and Paul Reiser.

ing. It was very tough.

Bob: Same thing happened to *Cattle Annie and Little Britches*. Got great reviews and Universal just let it die. Very disturbing.

Barry: You wrote that? That's a picture with great reviews. I never even got a chance to see it. You know what the great irony of the movie business is? They scream, "Pictures cost too much!" But when you bring it in for a good price, in *Diner's* case, five million dollars, ultimately the distributors don't care about it.

Bob: Yeah, but I have hopes for *Diner*. It really captures something not only about Baltimore but about America at that time. I mean in a realer way than, say, *American Graffiti*. Not as idealized.

Barry: Aren't you doing a book about Baltimore now?

Bob: Yeah, it's about current Baltimore. It concerns three close friends and a child, and their mixed reactions to their city's becoming a trendy place. It's a book about friendship, too, and how much you owe the past.

Barry: That sounds like my obsession. I can't let Baltimore go. It's a place like no other. Gritty and real, you know. . .

Bob: But you're on the West Coast now. How did you get from our old city to Hollywood?

Barry: You know, growing up in Baltimore, you don't really think you're ever going to get to be an adult. I used to think I was just going to get an allowance until I died. But I finally went to school in D.C., at American University. I worked as an assistant director at WTOP-TV while I was there. I was

not your highly motivated student. I had this wild job there, putting in the commercials for "The Late Show." Later, in the promotion department, I wrote stuff like, "Tonight on 'Perry Mason': The Case of the Scarlet Woman." My grades suffered but I never cared. I liked to let them get as low as possible and then see how high a grade I would have to get to pass. But it was tiring. Then I moved on to the morning news and I had to get up at four. One of my jobs was to do the traffic report, but I'd oversleep, so on the way to work I'd just make it up.

Bob: You're kidding! That's great! Maybe Vietnam and El Salvador have been handled the same way.

Barry: Yeah, well, you know the traffic never changes. "A little congestion on Wisconsin Avenue. Flowing smoothly on Connecticut." I loved it.

Bob: Working at a TV station must have given you a good sense of film. Watching all those late shows.

Barry: It did. When I made the move to L.A., I knew I wanted to do films. I tried acting school, and that was fun. Then I had a partner, Craig Nelson, and we got a job on a local television show. The Lohman and Barkley show. I was very lucky. They needed two guys who would write and perform on the show. Because it was local, we got to do all kinds of things. We had a skit called "Doctors and Vikings." Doctors would talk to each other, and every once in a while a Viking would walk through. We also did another skit, which didn't work quite as well, called "Lawyers and Pigs."

We thought it would be funny to have guys dressed like lawyers in pinstriped suits, spouting legalese and carrying pigs—piglets really—around with them. You know, never mention the fact. Just have the pigs there. Well, the prop guy got things mixed up and brought us fifty- and sixty-pound hogs! We had to carry them around and the hogs got nervous and started peeing all over the stage. It was really wild.

Waitress: You two guys gonna order anything? Or is this a social visit?

Bob: We're creating a great cloud of public relations for this restaurant. OK, gimme some fries.

Barry: And a cherry coke.

Bob: Good Baltimore lunch food. It sounds like you've had some fun out West, but I know it must have been tough breaking into films.

Barry: Oh, sure. You have to take a lot of meetings that don't work out. My favorite was with a studio guy. I was pitching him a movie idea, and halfway through he says to me, "Barry, that's great. You talk to your people and I'll talk to mine and we'll have a meeting next week." So I said, "Solid," and I walked outside. Then I said to myself, "Wait a minute. Just who are my people? I mean, I don't have any people." You know what I'm saying?

Bob: God, yes. The naked writer. I had a meeting last year. An agent told me to see a producer who had read a script I wrote. I got there, and she kept me waiting for an hour. When I was finally ready to leave, she called me in and said, "Bob, sit down. I loved your script. I heard it's terrific."

Barry: Yeah, it's tough. But when I started to work with Mel Brooks... well, that was great. He's really generous and secure enough to take ideas. You don't have to worry that he'll cut things because you thought of them. And with Brooks you get to see the stuff being shot the same day you thought of it, and you're there with him talking about another beat for the laugh, or camera angles. Doing *Silent Movie* and *High Anxiety* with Mel was worth about three years of school.

Bob: Yeah, I like his movies, because they're really vulgar one second and poetic the next. So when did you make the move to... *And Justice for All*? That was a strong black comedy.

Barry: When I was working on *High Anxiety*, my wife, Valerie Curtin, and I decided to do a script on the judicial system. We were working on it for eight months with no support. I mean, nobody would even take a meeting with us for it. You know Hollywood. "You want to do a movie about French toast? Good, let's take a meeting."

But for a black comedy about the judicial system, forget it. Not one meeting. It was terribly frustrating. Finally, Joe Wizan, the producer, got involved, but he couldn't get a meeting with anybody until Danny Melnick stepped in. Melnick read the script and suggested a few changes. Valerie and I made them, and the next thing we knew they wanted to do it.

Bob: That's what is so loony about the movie business. Something looks dead, totally finished, and the next thing you know it's on. How did Pacino get involved?

Barry: We always had him in mind. My agent, Mike Ovitz, sent it to him and he said he'd have a reading. Now, when Al reads, he has all his friends come over and they read the script out loud. But slowly, I mean very slowly. So slowly that I got panicky. You couldn't tell if there were laughs there or not, at that speed. So I went back to the hotel, and I said to my wife, "Well, that's it, it's all over. It's no go." I was sitting in the bathtub without water, you know? Down the drain. Two hours later, Mike calls and says, "Al loves it. We have a deal." It was great.

Bob: That's terrific. You said you'd written an entire script. Now, *Cattle Annie* was the first script I ever wrote, and I did it without help from any producers, until Rupert Hitzig bought it. I know that if I had taken meetings on it, everybody would have said, "Are you kidding? A comedy Western with two little girls as the stars? Forget it." So my ignorance of the meeting-taking syndrome allowed me to finish and sell the script. Do you generally complete a script first?

Barry: If I can. I think if a writer has the money and can take the time to do a whole script, that's the way to go. You can waste a ton of time in meetings and having a lot of people tell you, "This needs changing." "That element has to be added." And then when you make the changes, they don't want it. So it's best to do a whole script.

Bob: What are you doing now?

Barry: Well, I've got a movie called *Best Friends* with Burt Reynolds and Goldie Hawn. [It's scheduled for Christmas release.] About two writers who live together and drive each other a little crazy.

Bob: More autobiography. Another thing you hear not to do. Everybody now is screaming, "Give us *Blue Lagoon II*!" "Give us *Brooke Gives Up Youth*!"

Barry: Yeah, that's what they're saying this week. But the truth is if you write what you really care about with style and passion, then you'll be all right. Somebody will come along who can tell the difference. For sure. ■

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HERZOG

THE GOD OF WRATH

The dream of *Fitzcarraldo* became a nightmare.
A tale of obsession, madness—and art.

Michael Goodwin

Dreamland

"We knew we would run into difficulties, but that they would be so serious . . . we couldn't imagine. We tried to think the unthinkable, but our imaginations were not fertile enough. We have been walking on a brink between two abysses, and we have still not fallen down, but it's getting very, very narrow now. People have lost their lives. If I believed in the Devil, I would say that the Devil was right here, and is still right here. But I have no choice, I have to do this work. I live my life or I end my life with this project."

—Werner Herzog, in a jungle camp near the confluence of Rio Urubamba and Rio Camisea, state of Ucayali, in southern Peru, 1981.



Werner Herzog calls it "the dreamland . . . a landscape in ecstasy, a landscape in trance." From seven thousand feet in a southbound single-engine Cessna, the Amazon jungle appears to stretch for thousands of miles in every direction, a green sea of trees, with nothing to give perspective, nothing to offer even the slightest hope of survival. There are no radio beacons, no landmarks, nothing but the gigantic, muddy Rio Ucayali,

writhing across the prehistoric landscape from the city of Iquitos, in the north (where it joins the Marañón and the Napo to become the Amazon), to the town of Atalaya, in the south (where it is born in the confluence of the Urubamba and the Tambo). The Cessna is bound past Atalaya to a tiny airstrip on the Urubamba at the Indian village of Camisea—some 250 miles due east of Lima. There's patchy cloud cover, but no matter where the clouds break, the great river is there—twisting, winding, doubling back on itself.

For nearly five years, the flamboyant German filmmaker Werner Herzog, one of the most enigmatic, talented, uncompromising cinema artists in the world, has been locked in a desperate struggle with this jungle dreamland, fighting to make a film called *Fitzcarraldo*. Herzog, at thirty-nine, is no stranger to difficulty. He worked nights as a welder in a steel factory for two years to finance his first three short films—and stole a camera he needed from a television crew.

Nor is his fierce determination deflected by danger; quite the opposite, in fact. Sometimes it seems that unless he can risk his life in search of new images for a film, he isn't interested. His eerie documentary *La Soufrière* (1976) was filmed on the slopes of an erupting volcano that experts swore was about to explode. (They were wrong, but Herzog had no way of knowing.) When a dwarf actor was injured during the filming of his surreal second feature, *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1969), Herzog promised to fling himself into a giant

Fitzcarraldo's folly: Kinski and the steamship.





Hauling a 320-ton steamship over a mountain proved too big a job even for this determined Indian extra.

cactus at the completion of the picture; he still has spines in the sinew of his knee. During filming, in Peru, of *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), a hallucinatory parable about a ruthless, megalomaniac sixteenth-century conquistador defeated by the Peruvian jungle, his raft was trapped in a whirlpool for five days. (It was on this same film that Herzog had his legendary confrontation with actor Klaus Kinski—whom Herzog has described as “a paranoid schizophrenic.” When Herzog refused to fire a sound man, as Kinski wanted, the actor threatened to walk off the picture. Herzog pulled a gun. “Before you reach the bend in the river,” he said, “there will be eight bullets in your head, and the last one will be for me.” Kinski finished the picture.)

But even for Herzog, *Fitzcarraldo* has been an extraordinary series of setbacks, disappointments, and disasters. He made his first, preliminary expedition in 1977, deep into the brutal equatorial jungle of northern Peru, looking for a critical

configuration of rivers, mountains, and rapids. He was planning a visionary adventure film, in English, aimed at a large American audience—the latest in a series of attempts to move his art films into the commercial arena. It would be his most expensive picture, with a budget in the millions—but Jack Nicholson had expressed interest in playing the lead, and Mick Jagger was seriously considering a supporting role, so financing would be relatively easy. Herzog sank all his savings into preproduction. He bought a house in Iquitos (a river port near the headwaters of the Amazon, sixteen hundred miles upriver from the Atlantic), where he set up a production office. He found and refitted two full-size steamships for important roles. He recruited hundreds of Indian extras. And he built a camp for cast and crew in the dense rain forest close to the Ecuadorian border, where the fierce Aguaruna Indians have lived for hundreds of years.

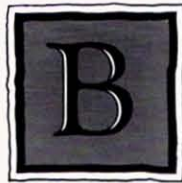
He also invited his friend Les Blank, forty-six, an indepen-

By late 1979, Warren Oates had replaced Jack Nicholson. The start date was only months away when real trouble began.

dent filmmaker primarily known for a series of brilliant, poetic films on traditional American music and food (*The Blues Accordin' to Lightnin' Hopkins*, *Chulas Fronteras*, *Always for Pleasure*, *Garlic Is As Good As Ten Mothers*), to shoot a documentary on the making of *Fitzcarraldo* for German and American television. Unlike Herzog, who seems to take pleasure in imposing his will on the universe, Blank is a diffident, soft-spoken man who tries to interfere with the action as little as possible—making him an exemplary documentarist. Yet these unlikely comrades have been pals since the mid-seventies, when Herzog noticed a man in Blank's Cajun film, *Spend It All*, calmly yanking out his own aching tooth with a pair of pliers and borrowed the image for *Stroszek*. Several years later, Blank filmed a short, revealing comedy called *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe*, in which Herzog made good on a bet by doing just that in front of a Berkeley film audience. Blank and I have maintained a stormy friendship for some years, and I crew on his films from time to time; in fact, I was an interviewer and camera assistant on *Shoe*. So when I heard he was heading for Peru, my first thought was that maybe I could tag along.

In a darkening sky, only five hundred feet above the Urubamba, the pilot floats the Cessna along the twisting watercourse, looking for somewhere to land. Suddenly, a tiny clearing appears with eight or nine thatch-roof huts lined up nearby, and the Cessna drops toward it with dizzying speed. The clearing is covered with green grass, crisscrossed with deep ruts and mud puddles, and twenty-five Indian kids are playing soccer in the middle of it. They scatter as the Cessna crashes into the first big mud puddle and starts skidding sideways, the windshield browned out by splashing muck. At sickening speed, accompanied by terrifying creaks and groans from the undercarriage, the plane slams through ruts and holes, sliding at last to a slow roll near the far jungle wall.

It's late afternoon in the jungle. The air is soft and moist, fragrant with the smells of wood smoke and flowers. A six-year-old boy in a brown *cushma* (a poncho sewn together under the arms) walks shyly up to the plane and starts drawing whales in the fresh mud on the fuselage. Then I notice that each whale has three wheels, and I realize he's drawing Cessnas.



y late 1979, two and a half years after preproduction started, Nicholson had bowed out, to be replaced by Warren Oates; Mick Jagger and Claudia Cardinale were also in. The start date was only months away when the real trouble began.

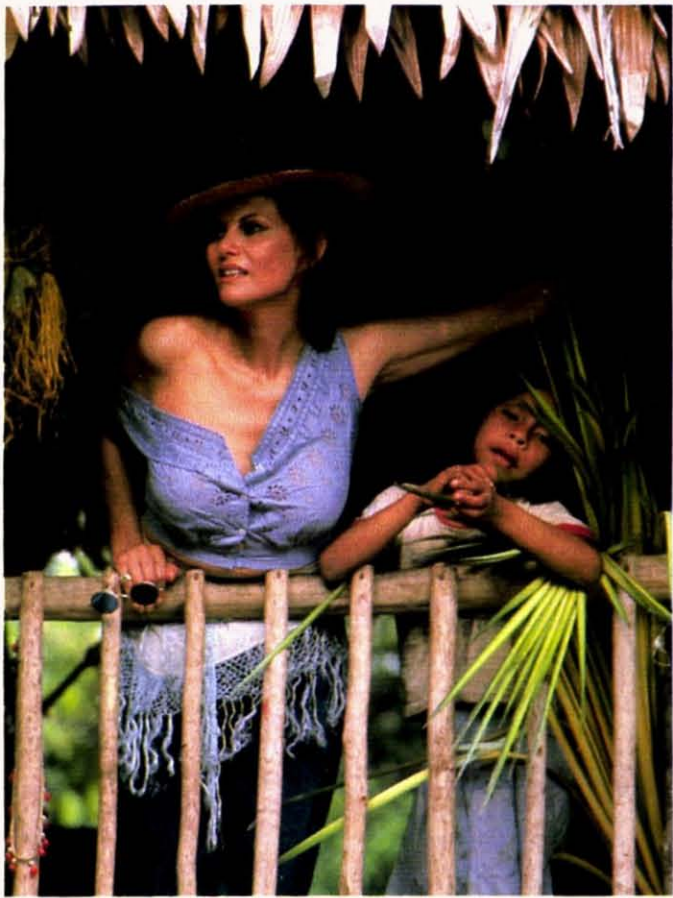
Herzog had chosen his jungle location in northern Peru primarily for its geography; he needed two rivers that nearly touched, with certain other topographic features as well. But he had walked, unknowingly, into the middle of a tense situation. Twenty-five miles away, Peru and Ecuador were building up to a small border war. The jungle was full of soldiers, and the Aguaruna Indians were touchy. To make matters worse, the Peruvian government was encouraging settlers to move into the jungle—a process the Indians are

powerless to stop without legal title to the land. The Aguarunas see every stranger as a threat to their territory—and with justification. Herzog assured them he wasn't moving in permanently, but some were not convinced.

On top of everything else, Herzog found himself tangled in a tribal power struggle. A newly formed Aguaruna tribal council had been trying to establish political leadership over all the Indian communities in the area, and the council members saw Herzog's film as the perfect issue to dramatize their position. For one thing, they didn't want Indians portrayed as backward savages. "They didn't really want to be natives," notes Herzog with bemused disapproval. "They said they were Peruvians and, besides, an underprivileged class. They understood themselves as a class instead of a culture." Moreover, Herzog's hero, Fitzcarraldo, is loosely based on a real person who, according to the council, mistreated and enslaved Indians. The council didn't believe Indians should cooperate with a movie in which Fitzcarraldo was portrayed sympathetically.

Not everyone supported the council. Although Herzog was paying only \$3.50 a day, it was twice the going wage for Indian labor, and many Aguarunas wanted to work for him. In one instance, the council actually put out a warrant for the arrest

As Fitzcarraldo's lover, Claudia Cardinale was the only original star to survive the film's calamities.



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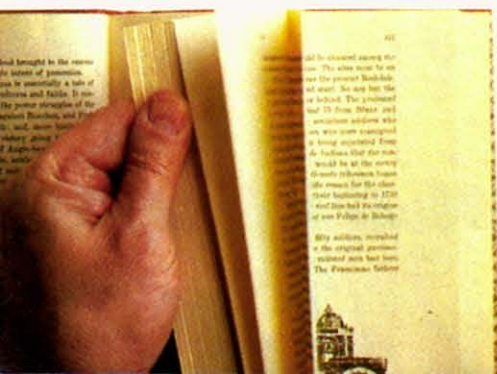
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Six weeks after filming began, Jason Robards came down with dysentery and flew home. Then Mick Jagger dropped out.

of a pro-Herzog Indian leader, charging him with treason.

At this point the situation devolved into a *Rashomon* set of conflicting versions. Depending on the source—Peruvian newspapers, German leftists, human rights organizations, Herzog himself—the filmmaker emerges either as a black-hearted villain abusing the natives or a scapegoat through whom the Aguarunas could strike back at larger forces (the government, the military, the settlers) they could not otherwise attack in safety.

According to Herzog, when tensions rose to the point of whispered death threats, he went, alone and unarmed, to hear the council's complaints. The members asked him to sign a statement promising to leave the country immediately. He refused. They locked the door. Herzog asked if they wanted to tell him more—and the tension broke. By the time the door was unlocked, it appeared that Herzog and the Aguarunas had reached agreement. At this point, in Herzog's account, two German agitators appeared with photographs of concentration camps in which piles of skeletons and mangled bodies were prominently featured. This, the Aguarunas were told, is what Herzog will do to your villages, and then he will boil your bodies down for fat.

One point, at least, is undisputed. On December 1, 1979, when Herzog and most of his crew were gone, armed Indians surrounded their jungle camp and ordered everyone to leave. When the camp was empty, the Aguarunas burned it to the ground. Herzog's skeleton crew fled downriver, flying white flags from their canoe.

Two weeks later, Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action bulletin after two Indians and a French agronomist were jailed by the Guardia Civil in Santa Maria de Nieva in connection with the incident. Although Amnesty never suggested that Herzog had anything to do with the jailings, it did send him a telegram asking him (as a local celebrity) to intervene in behalf of the prisoners, whom Amnesty feared would be mistreated. Herzog was glad to do so. Unfortunately, a German newspaper, drawing a false inference from the telegram, printed a report that Amnesty International had accused Werner Herzog of violating the human rights of natives—a report that was picked up and embroidered by many journalists around the world. Herzog remains deeply bitter about the incident. "The press only want to make you a dancing bear in their circus," he snaps darkly.

It took a year and millions of dollars no one had, but by November 1980, the *Fitzcarraldo* location had been shifted fifteen hundred miles to the south, a new jungle camp had been built, Herzog (who wanted no recurrence of the Aguaruna situation) had reached a deal with the Machiguenga Indians, on whose territory he would be shooting, to help them secure legal title to their land, and the two steamships were on their way upriver.

Then, four weeks before shooting was to begin, Warren Oates, who had never signed a contract, decided he didn't want to spend three months in a remote jungle location far from family and friends. "If I don't have a leading man by January," swore Herzog, "I'm going to kill myself!" No one who knew him doubted for a second that he would do it; he had

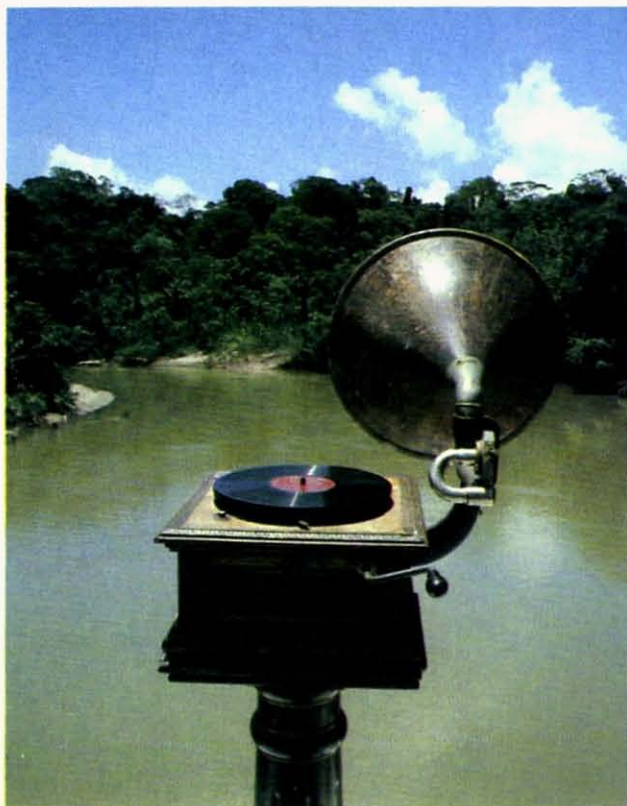
long before declared his belief that film is worth more than life.

In January 1981, after a two-month delay, filming started at last—with Jason Robards replacing Oates, Mick Jagger in a supporting role, and Claudia Cardinale as the female lead. Six weeks later, with forty percent of the film shot—the hardest forty percent—Robards came down with a bad case of amoebic dysentery and flew home to Connecticut; from there he sent word that he was under doctor's orders not to return to the set under any circumstances. The *New York Times* reported he had told friends that there was no physician or refrigerator on the set, and that the cast was subjected to dangerous scenes in rafts over rapids and flights in unsafe airplanes.

Then Mick Jagger dropped out, too. Commitments for a new album and a concert tour made it impossible for him to stay the extra months needed to reshoot the film from scratch. "It was the worst thing that hit us," Herzog says. "The man was very good, incredibly good. I think it's the biggest loss I've had in my career." In a commercial sense, there was no question about it. Losing Jagger, the film immediately lost a big piece of the mass audience Herzog (and his backers) had been counting on.

But Herzog was unable to quit. Jagger was irreplaceable, so he wrote out his part—Fitzcarraldo's sidekick, a simple-

Opposite, Herzog supervises construction on a tangled mountainside, while Kinski watches from above. Below, a peaceful view from the ship's bridge.



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minded actor who spouts Shakespearean soliloquies—and gave the footage to Blank for the documentary. Then he suspended production for two months, leaving many people in the jungle, while he went looking for a new leading man. In desperation, he considered playing the part himself. But in the end he settled on Klaus Kinski, the brilliant, temperamental actor with whom he had worked on *Aguirre*, *Nosferatu*, and *Wozzeck*. Kinski was not an ideal choice. The role, as written, called for a charming Irishman who becomes obsessed—and if Kinski was perfect for the obsessive part, he would have a hard time projecting warmth and charm. But Herzog was under the gun. If he waited for the perfect lead to come along, the film would crumble around his shoulders.



In April, years behind schedule and millions over budget, *Fitzcarraldo* went before the cameras again. Three months later, I got a telex from Les Blank inviting me to join him in the jungle to replace his camera assistant, Bruce "Pacho" Lane, who had to return to the States.

From the airstrip, a muddy trail leads a quarter of a mile to the confluence of the Rio Camisea and Rio Urubamba. There's no dock—just a steep, slippery clay bank, at the bottom of which waits a battered canoe, twenty-five feet long, four feet wide, with ankle-deep water sloshing inside. The name of the boat is *Rey del Urubamba*, "King of the Urubamba." It's a dugout with planks added to heighten the sides and a seventy h.p. outboard at the stern. Water spurts in through cracks between the planks, and there's an ominous fissure amidships that threatens to break the boat in half. We pile it high with camera equipment, beer, meat, gasoline drums, and luggage, trying to keep some of the supplies out of the bilge water. Then we start the engine and roar up the Camisea into the upper Amazon jungle. There's a two-man crew; one man steers, one man bails.

Trees lining the riverbank glow a deep, dark, sunset green. Now and then an Indian hut breaks the wall of foliage, but otherwise it's inexhaustible, untamed wilderness: the tan, choppy river running past clay banks, sand beaches, expanses of white stones. Great trees tower out of the vegetable crush, reaching for the sky and survival, their crown branches silhouetted against a sexy pink and purple sunset. Some trees are covered with red flowers that breathe a musky, erotic perfume. Birds and cicadas produce exotic sound effects: ascending whoops like a crash-diving submarine, rusty squawks like a squeaky, slow-turning wheel, rude sucking noises like wet kisses.

After an hour the light is almost gone, the colors faded to gray. Suddenly, looming out of the dark, a strange thing begins to appear: a broad, muddy trench, gouged into the jungle, running from the river up a steep, densely overgrown hillside. As we come closer, an even stranger thing comes into view: In the trench at the base of the slope, halfway out of the water, lies a full-size steamship, surrounded by cables, pulleys, and ten crude wooden winches. If you didn't know better you'd think some madman were trying to pull the ship right up the forty-degree slope and over the hill.

Which is exactly what's happening. The ship going over the hill is the central metaphor in Herzog's movie—an idiosyncratic variation on *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, set during the rubber boom at the turn of the century. Fitzcarraldo is a poor, charming, opera-mad Irishman, ob-

essed with the idea of building a grand opera house in Iquitos where his idol, Enrico Caruso, can sing. To achieve his dream, he sets out to become a wealthy rubber baron—but the only rubber trees still unclaimed are up an impassable river beyond the Rapids of Death. When Fitzcarraldo discovers that a navigable river winds within a kilometer of the impassable river *above the rapids*, he borrows enough money from his lover, Molly (Cardinale), the madam of Iquitos's leading whorehouse, to buy a broken-down steamship. Somehow, he will drag the ship from one river system to the other. The fact that it's obviously impossible doesn't bother him; he will force the universe to submit to his will.

Herzog's story is based on a real incident. Around the turn of the century, a man named Fitzcarrald did in fact move a small steamship from one jungle river to another by taking it apart and forcing Indians to carry the pieces. But Herzog's ship is ten times the size and weight of Fitzcarrald's, and he's trying to move it in one piece. He says he's doing it for the film, to create an image no one has ever seen before. His detractors, of which there are many, would argue that he seeks impossible challenges to prove himself.

Half a mile upriver, electric lights drive back the night, and a precarious wooden stairway leads up from the river to an enchanted village of wooden, thatch-roof huts, aerial walkways, and tiny wooden suspension bridges. The smell of food cooking drifts down the bank from a graceful, two-story, open-air dining room made entirely of reed, bark, and native wood. The only sour note comes from the two-way radio link with the outside world: a yammering squawk that never stops—"Camisea, Camisea, Camisea, Iquitos, cambio!" over and over. It's blazing hot in the sun, chilly when it clouds over, and people sleep under blankets at night. Sudden, heavy rain can fall at any hour of the day or night, and clothing never dries

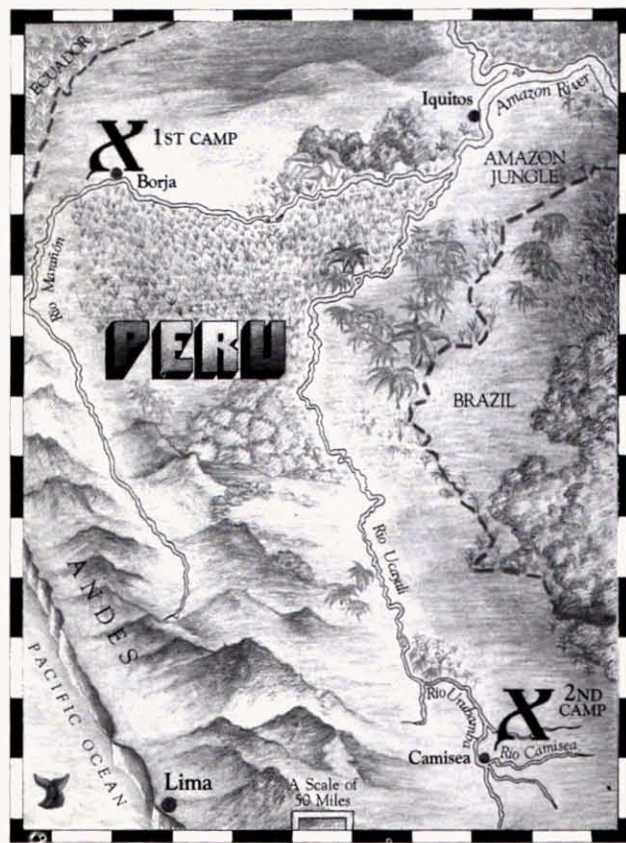
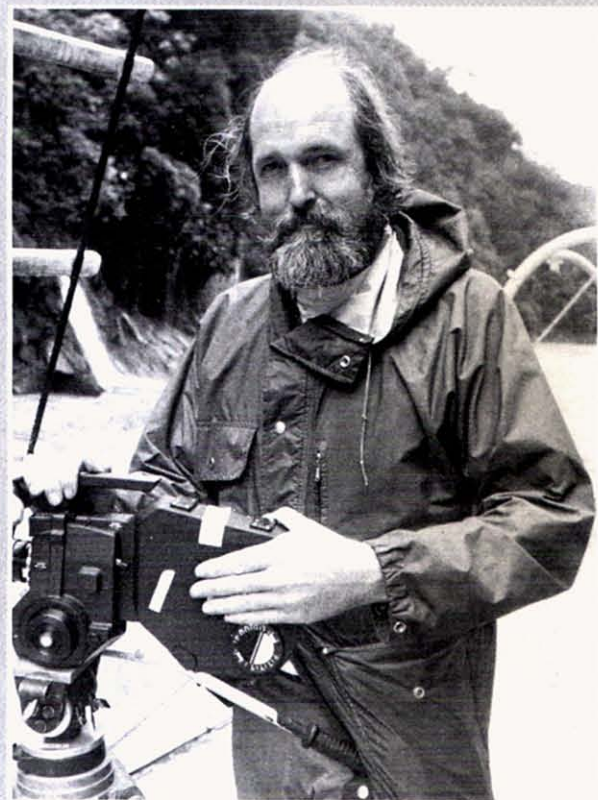


Illustration by Karen Cogar

Burden of Dreams



Maureen Gosling

Last September Les Blank and Maureen Gosling hastily spliced together forty minutes of dailies—mostly interviews with Werner Herzog on location in Peru—to show at the Telluride Film Festival as a work in progress. In a sense, they were asking for trouble. Herzog is a controversial figure at Telluride. Some people consider him a hero; others hate his guts. Predictably, reaction to the unedited footage was explosive.

Everyone agreed that it was stunning—some said it was the best work Blank had ever done—but without context, Herzog's visionary monologues made him seem wildly egomaniacal. A number of people agreed with *Los Angeles Times* critic Kevin Thomas that it was "the most devastating portrait of a filmmaker ever made." Controversy raged long after the screening, with heated arguments about artistic responsibility, aestheticization of suffering, and whether art was worth the loss of even one human life.

Rumors circulated that Herzog's friend, director Volker Schlöndorff, was offering to buy the negative from Blank on the spot so no one would ever see it again. But, according to Blank, he never made the offer. Carlos Diegues, the director of *Bye Bye Brasil*, was reportedly so upset with what he saw as Herzog's shameless pride and indifference to human misery that he became ill and had to leave the auditorium.

In a long piece in the *Times*, Kevin Thomas cited one observer's comparison of Herzog and Kinski to Hitler and Goebbels, and concluded, "Blank's film shows us an utterly humorless man spouting a lot of half-baked delirious ro-

manticism." Blank was furious with Thomas's article, which he characterized as "unfair" and "premature." Blank was understandably uneasy—since Herzog had not yet signed a release to appear in the film.

First word from Herzog after the Telluride incident was an urgent request that there be no more screenings until he could see the footage. Shortly thereafter, he showed up in Blank's editing room in El Cerrito, California, and looked at five hours of dailies. He was uneasy about several sequences—a few monologues, an interview about sanitation in Belén—but the decision to use them or not was left to Blank. For the most part Herzog was pleased with what he saw. Blank and Gosling were relieved, and set about building a film for PBS.

In January, they screened a two-hour rough cut of the film, with a working title of "Película o Muerte," at Berkeley's prestigious Pacific Film Archive. Two capacity audiences seemed to love every minute, but there was some confusion. "We heard about Telluride," someone said, "and how bad Werner came off. What happened to that footage? Did you cut it out?"

"It's all still in there," Blank insisted. "But now, instead of just watching Werner go crazy, you can see all the stuff that's making him crazy. That's what editing is about."

On March 23, a nearly final version of the film, now titled *Burden of Dreams*, was shown at Filmex. The audience was enthusiastic, and all the reviews were highly favorable—but the review that meant the most to Blank was Kevin Thomas's. The finished film "is not merely more comprehensive but more comprehensible than the controversial forty minutes [Blank] showed at the last Telluride festival," Thomas wrote. "Herzog, now in context, doesn't seem quite the madman he did before. It's hard to remember a more revealing portrait of a filmmaker and filmmaking."

On April 4, Herzog turned up in the Bay Area to look at the final version of *Burden of Dreams*. He sat on the hard wooden steps of the stockroom at Arhoolie Records that Blank uses as a makeshift screening room and watched the now ninety-three-minute film, taking occasional swigs from a bottle of potent Aguardiente that his friend, a lady sheriff, had provided. When the film was over he got up without a word, walked over to Blank, kissed him on both cheeks and on the forehead, and playfully pulled his beard.

"You shouldn't touch this film any more," Herzog said. "It's completely unique. It's not even embarrassing, which is remarkable, since filmmakers almost always look stupid when you see films about them. It's because filmmaking is illusionist's work. A cook never looks stupid in a film, only a filmmaker."

That evening Herzog screened a print of *Fitzcarraldo* for Blank, Gosling, and a few friends, providing an improvised "voice-over" translation of the German. When the lights came up, Herzog looked around. "Did you ever expect me to make such a funny film?" he asked with his familiar, mischievous grin. Blank popped the cork on a bottle of champagne, poured some for everyone, and raised his glass. "To the conquistador of the useless!" he toasted, quoting a line from *Fitzcarraldo*. "To Werner Herzog!"

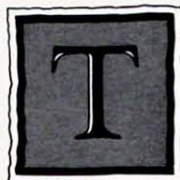
Burden of Dreams is scheduled for broadcast by PBS on June 11.—M.G.

out all the way. This is the jungle camp, which Herzog has named *Película o Muerte*, "Film or Death."

Arrows in Flesh

"It's like a nightmare, but we are not allowed to slip out of it. We are doing things almost against the laws of nature, things that have no technical precedence, moving a ship this large over a mountain. But I have no fear. Aside from not being afraid I am not even allowed to be afraid. If I started to panic the film would disintegrate in less than a day. So I do not have the privilege of depression, of melancholy, of despair."

—Werner Herzog



There is often unlimited rum and *pisco* (the local rotgut) in the dining room, and Blank, a cautious man, has been diverting small amounts into a private stash. On the front porch of his reed-and-bark hut, the floor of which rolls like a waterbed, Blank, Maureen Gosling (his longtime editor, sound recordist, and second camera), and I open a bottle while I catch up on the bad news.

Torrential rains, the heaviest in twenty-five years, have slowed shooting to a crawl. Two small planes loaded with Indians crashed on takeoff from a jungle airstrip, seriously injuring a number of people. In the camp across the river, five Indians have died from disease and drowning, and more than three hundred natives wait impatiently to be sent home; most of them signed on for only three months, but endless delays have trapped them in the same nightmare that bedevils Herzog. Some have been here six months. One of the steamships got loose in the rapids (unfortunately, without a camera running), and has now run aground on a sandbar, out of action until next year's rainy season. Hostile Indians ambushed a Machiguenga couple in the no-man's-land two hours upriver and shot them with arrows.

And with only a few days left before Herzog and crew must be in Iquitos to film Claudia Cardinale, the ship, Herzog's central metaphor, will not move up the hill. A complicated system involving a giant D-8 Caterpillar bulldozer pulling a cable around a pivot point and through a massive gang of pulleys succeeded in getting the 320-ton steamship halfway out of the water. But when the ship started up the steep hillside it moved only three feet before a huge metal coupling snapped in half. Laplace Martins, the Brazilian engineer in charge of moving the ship, had maintained all along that a twenty-degree slope was the limit of the technology. But Herzog, ever mindful of the image, insisted, "Unless we do forty degrees, we might as well not bother with a hill at all, but just dig the Panama Canal."

Days before my arrival, Martins quit, fearing fatalities in what he considered an ill-advised attempt with heavier couplings and cables. Production manager Walter Saxer, a determined, intelligent man; but with insufficient technical experience, has taken over the project. The *trocha*, the muddy trench in which the ship has to move, is surrounded by jungle, and if the system tears loose there's nowhere to run. Between flying cables, pinwheeling winches, sliding ships, and God

knows what else, an accident is almost sure to be fatal. "If the cable breaks," notes Blank balefully, "it's all over. Run for cover and hope the Indians don't kill you."

Paradoxically, the one thing that's going well is the documentary. Blank and Gosling are getting fabulous disaster footage—everything from the tractor sinking helplessly into a giant mud hole to Indians snatching arrows out of the air, deadly bushmaster snakes being killed, Kinski screaming at Saxer, and a steamship crashing into rocks in the rapids, drifting backward in current too strong for it, getting stuck on a sandbar. And the documentarists are getting hour after fascinating hour of Herzog describing his dreams and terrors in words as amazing and strange as his images. "I think he's afraid the documentary may be the only thing to come out of all this," Blank explains.

At the long breakfast table the next morning, Herzog sits alone, reading a German newsmagazine. At the other end of the table, Kinski, blond hair shining, reads an old *Variety* while he breaks open his egg. "Carlos!" he snaps, and when the Indian kitchen boy walks over, Kinski holds up the egg wordlessly. Carlos takes it away, his face impassive.

Bill Rose, the dialogue coach, a bearded New Yorker with a breezy line of talk, walks over to Herzog. "What are we shooting this morning?" he asks.

Herzog looks up darkly. "Why do you always ask this stupid, unbearable, obnoxious question?" he inquires ominously.

Kinski glances over, pantomimes drawing a bow, and aims it at Rose. "This morning we shoot, with arrow in *flesh*, all people who ask stupid questions."

"This morning we shoot Herzog," says Herzog.

El Invencible

"We can't seem to cure the Indians of the idea that our everyday life is only an illusion, behind which lies the reality of dreams."

—missionary in Herzog's screenplay



At the center of Herzog's art is his obsession with new images, images never seen before: a landscape filled with a thousand windmills in *Signs of Life* (1967), an endless series of shimmering aircraft sinking slowly through a mirage in *Fata Morgana* (1969), a driverless car turning manic circles in *Even Dwarfs Started Small*. "I have worked and suffered and done everything out of a background of dreams and visions I have seen," he says. "All these dreams are yours as well. The only distinction between me and you is that I can articulate them."

In the movie, after a terrible journey upriver, Fitzcarraldo decides to give up and go back to Iquitos. But when he looks behind him, he sees an incredible sight silhouetted against the sunset: Giant trees are crashing into the river, and a line of savage Indians in canoes stretches across the river, cutting off his retreat. Today, Herzog is shooting Fitzcarraldo's point-of-view shot.

There are eighteen people riding downriver in our boat: two camera crews, several actors, pyrotechnicians, even Carmen,



Herzog, flanked by assistants, contemplates putting Kinski and his Indians through yet another take.

our bubbly, twenty-two-year-old camp prostitute. (Peruvian workers expect employers to provide whores in remote jungle work sites. But Carmen is so special that Herzog ends up casting her in a bit part as an assistant to the ship's cook.) Heavy camera equipment and several cases of dynamite complete the overload. There's no room for the man who bails out the boat, so Herzog takes over his job.

By the time we reach the location, half an hour downriver, fifteen or twenty one-man rafts and dugouts are already tying on to a heavy rope stretched tightly across the river. While the camera crews set up on a large metal barge tied at the bank, Herzog, barefoot and clad only in yellow swim trunks, leaps into the boat *El Invencible* and roars toward the line of canoes, standing heroically at the bow, yelling orders in Spanish.

As the hot afternoon lengthens toward dusk, Indians pole and paddle their boats into place, and the line fills in—but Herzog still seems edgy. This is a crucial shot, and it won't work unless everything comes together in precisely the right ten minutes: canoes, cameras, dynamite, sunset. But except for Herzog and the men placing explosive charges, there's nothing for anyone to do but wait and watch. Zeze, the Brazilian sound recordist, passes the time panning for gold in a tiny stream along the bank.

The only excitement comes when Blank and I jump on top of a small speedboat and head up to the line to shoot close-ups, only to be caught by the swift river current and tangled in the rope. Fierce, warlike Indians, wearing red face paint and

carrying bows and arrows, fend us off one after another, grinning as they shove us down the line. Blank tries to shoot, but his new Aaton camera isn't working well. "There must be a fungus in the mechanism," he mutters unhappily. Somehow we end up on the wrong side of the rope and can't get back. Herzog, almost ready to shoot, screams frantically at us to get out of the shot and back to the barge, but the line snags us every time.

By now a contingent of Indian women and kids has gathered on the shore to watch. It's hard to say how much the Indians understand. A few of the men have served in the army, been to Lima and tasted the joys of civilization, but many had never seen a movie until Herzog showed them a print of *Aguirre*. We asked one man what he thought of it. "I don't understand this movie yet," he told us in Spanish. "I think it's crazy." But we were never sure if he meant *Aguirre* or *Fitzcarraldo*.

With Herzog's imprecations growing more malefic by the moment, our boat driver circles back, guns the engine to the limit, and roars toward the line, bouncing wildly. Blank clutches the Aaton, I clutch Blank. We jump over the rope between two canoes, the driver flips up the outboard to clear the prop, and we chug nonchalantly toward the camera barge.

With the sun below the trees and the backlight getting silvery, Herzog gives orders for boats to tie on to the barge and pull it into the middle of the river. As it swings wildly in midstream, Herzog dances barefoot along the deck, shouting orders in three languages. He jumps into *El Invencible*, motors

Days before my arrival, the engineer in charge of moving the ship quit, fearing fatalities in what he considered an ill-advised attempt.

down to the line for a last look, roars back, jumps into the water, grabs a rope, and climbs dripping onto the barge. "Mas al centro del río!" he yells—"More to the center of the river." Motors strain, and the barge starts to spin, caught in the current. Three cameras are turning.

Explosions rip the air. Giant trees lean, crack, crash into the water. The line of canoes glides toward the cameras, silhouetted against the shimmering silver river. "Despacio! Despacio!" yells Herzog over the laboring outboards—"Slow! Slow!" The barge drifts out of position, and Herzog arches his body, straining, as if he could physically shift the formation of canoes to maintain the perfection of the image. Presently the light dies out, and the cameras stop.

In total darkness, the Indians head home, paddling across the water, applauding. Herzog applauds back. Then he picks up Maureen Gosling and spins her around exuberantly. "Did you see the second tree?" he asks. "The big one? When Bubu [Herzog's second cameraman] heard the explosion, he pulled back, got the second tree, followed it all the way down, panned across the boats, and just when he got to the other side, the other trees went down and he got *them*."

One by one, the last boatfuls of laughing Indians float away into the night. Cool air chills the gringos waiting for a boat to come back for *them*, but as the half-moon rises and the scene dissolves into shades of black and phosphorescent silver, the magic is so intense that only a curmudgeon could complain. Herzog and Blank stand side by side, listening to the frogs, staring into the jungle. "Les," says Herzog mischievously, "let's pan gold. Without even looking—we'll do it by the weight of the sand."

After a time a boat returns, and the crew heads back upriver, crowded in next to ten young Indian men who missed their boat. The Indians smell mysterious and exotic, secreting faint odors of smoky campfires, strange plants, different loves and terrors. Some of them pass around a small gourd with a tiny hole bored in one end, from which they dip wild, boiled tobacco with a small carved twig and place it under their tongues. Others pass around a pack of filter-tip Winstons.

I look up past the black trees into an alien sky full of strange southern constellations. Herzog, sitting next to me, gives me an odd look. "It's beautiful," I murmur.

"It's *not* beautiful," snaps Herzog. "This sky is vile. They have no constellations, they just have chaos. The stars are a mess."

Doesn't Herzog love the jungle? "I am not full of admiration for the jungle," he declares. "I see it full of obscenity. Nature here is vile and base. I see fornication and asphyxiation and choking and fighting for survival and growing and rotting away. The trees here are in misery, the birds are in misery—they don't sing, they just screech in pain. We have to get acquainted with the idea that there is no harmony in the universe, no real harmony as we conceive it. There is *some* harmony in the jungle, a harmony of overwhelming, collective murder. In comparison to the articulate vileness and baseness and obscenity of all this jungle, we only sound and look like badly pronounced, half-finished sentences out of a stupid suburban novel. We don't belong here."

This Much Idiot No One Has Ever Been in the World



Nobody is going to give money if this continues!" snaps Kinski angrily over the Mexican pop-music cassette that an actor has been playing for days. "It's going to take two to three months to prepare a new system for moving the ship, and I don't have time to wait till next year." His voice rises in fury. "If he listens and believes another time that they can do it with this system, then fuck you! If I was the finance people, I would say, 'Are you crazy to pull a real ship over the mountain? No one has ever done it!' This much idiot no one has ever been in the world! He could use a model—people don't care as long as they see it on the screen. But he wants to pull a real ship!"

"He'll never get it over," Kinski's companion agrees, "no matter how many cables and pulleys he buys. He'll just kill a few people. It's one thing if he wants to risk his own life for his damn movie, but now he's risking other people's lives, too."

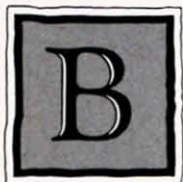
Second-guessing the general is as much a part of every film as it is of every war. But in these last, desperate days in the jungle camp, morale is at an all-time low. The money is virtually gone, there are only two days left before the crew has to be in Iquitos, and even Herzog has said that if the ship doesn't move, *Fitzcarraldo* will be in mortal jeopardy. Even if he succeeds in moving it later, the Indians will be gone—and what Herzog needs is the great, visionary master shot: ship moving, Indians straining at ropes, Fitzcarraldo dancing in the mud. No one really believes he will get it.

"He keeps saying he's not going to cheat," notes a crew member, "he's not going to pull a plastic boat over a Hollywood hill with the jungle back-projected—but he's pulling the ship with a bulldozer, not Indians."

"We won't go back to Iquitos unless the ship moves," chimes in a newcomer. "We were supposed to be back a month ago anyway."

"No," says Kinski, "we'll just sit here and listen to the Mexican music."

In the Trocha



Blank, Gosling, and I are struggling halfway up the steep, muddy slope of the *trocha* when night starts to fall. On the other side of the hill, where the trench descends to meet the Urubamba, Herzog is filming a wild, Indian fiesta, with music, dancing, and copious amounts of *masato*—a local, ceremonial intoxicant with the consistency of runny yogurt, made by chewing up a starchy vegetable called *yucca* and spitting it into a large wooden trough, where it quickly ferments to high alcoholic potency. Blank and Gosling are fools for ethnic music, and wouldn't dream of missing this bash—despite the fact that

"I am not full of admiration for the jungle," says Herzog. "I see it full of obscenity. Nature here is vile and base."

there's no room for us in the boats carrying actors and crew to the location. "Walk over the *trocha*," advised Herzog, as if he were saying, "Catch the bus around the corner."

Of course, Herzog has already walked over the *trocha* many times—probably barefoot—but Herzog is a crack athlete, an experienced mountain climber and ski-flier with the agility of a goat, the balance of a yogi, and the ability to climb bare, vertical slopes as easily as the Indians. We are mere mortals, and the closer we get to the *trocha* the nastier it looks. The D-8 has bulldozed away all the trees and topsoil, leaving naked clay—and torrential rains have turned the clay into a hellish red quagmire. The slope up from where the ship is stuck is relatively smooth, but even in the cool evening air, by the time we slog to the top, we're sweat-soaked and exhausted.

Nor is the flat hilltop a big improvement; it looks like an extraterrestrial obstacle course, littered with big fallen tree trunks and slashed by deep bulldozer tracks brimming with muddy sludge. We pick our way painfully under a darkening sky, trying to find stepping places that won't sink us into the mud over our boot tops, and failing far too often. After a horrible half hour, Blank, who's taking the point, turns and shouts, "Look, men, we've made it! There lies the Urubamba!" The descent is the hardest part of the traverse—slipping and crashing down a steep streambed running with water that hides rocks and mud-slick roots perfectly designed to turn ankles. As we near the bottom, two barefoot Indians pass us, descending with the effortless ease of New Yorkers going down the steps of a subway entrance.

Below us, on the riverbank, caught in the blue-white glare of a studio spotlight (powered by a gas generator in a boat), a hundred Indians are dancing in a drunken circle, beating drums, blowing reed pipes, falling down, laughing, singing, and drinking *masato* from small wooden bowls. Kinski is reeling in the dance, too, a tequila bottle in his fist, and Herzog and cameraman Thomas Mauch spin behind him, catching hand-held shots. Now and then Kinski stumbles out of the crowd to check his appearance in a small mirror.

Bonfires flare up on either side of the circle, and next to one of them three Indian women in bark *cushmas* dip *masato* out of the trough and pass it around. Blank finds a vacant camera case and sits quietly, entranced by the fierce music and spectacle. A green parrot rocks back and forth in ecstasy on his shoulder. "Les," says Gosling, "why aren't you shooting?"

"I'm too busy watching," says Blank.

After two solid hours, the roaring party has reached fever pitch. Up to now, the women at the *masato* trough have not partaken themselves, but finally they dip brimming bowls of the stuff, drink it down in big swallows, shift their babies to more comfortable positions, grin at each other, and break into high, wailing, nasal, three-part harmony that rides over the men's slow chant like birds circling over green jungle. Herzog and Mauch shoot them, too.

By nine-thirty, when we have to climb back over the *trocha*, the half-moon we've been counting on to light our way has disappeared behind a black rain cloud. Bill Rose, who doesn't even have a flashlight, tries to talk his way into the boat, but Herzog turns him down cold. "Well, look," says Rose, "if we

climb over the *trocha* will a boat meet us?"

"Certainly not," says Herzog. "You must wait until eleven."

The climb back, in near-total darkness, is much worse than before. Gosling and I find ourselves stumbling far behind the rest of the expedition. Their voices fade into the night.

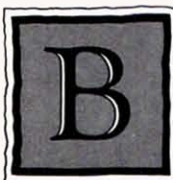
"Did I tell you about Werner and the wonderful bug?" she asks. "It was six inches long with wings like a helicopter, and it made a noise. It was psychedelic. Some native brought it down, and we filmed it, and then it flew away. Werner came over, and he got that evil, mischievous look on his face, and he said, 'I saw one of those things, and I killed it and kept it. You like to let things fly around, but sometimes it's necessary to murder.'"

When we stagger to the bottom of the hill, Herzog has a speedboat waiting for us, and it takes us home to cold showers and fiery glasses of *pisco*.

Track Shoes on a Paralyzed Man

"East you would have to walk two and a half thousand miles until the jungle ends. That way two thousand miles. This way you have to walk fifteen hundred miles. And this way you walk maybe five hundred miles. It's an unfinished country, it's still prehistoric—creation is not finished here yet. It's like a curse weighing on an entire landscape, and whoever goes too deep into this has a share of this curse—so we are cursed by what we are doing here. It's a land that God, if He exists, has created in anger."

—Werner Herzog

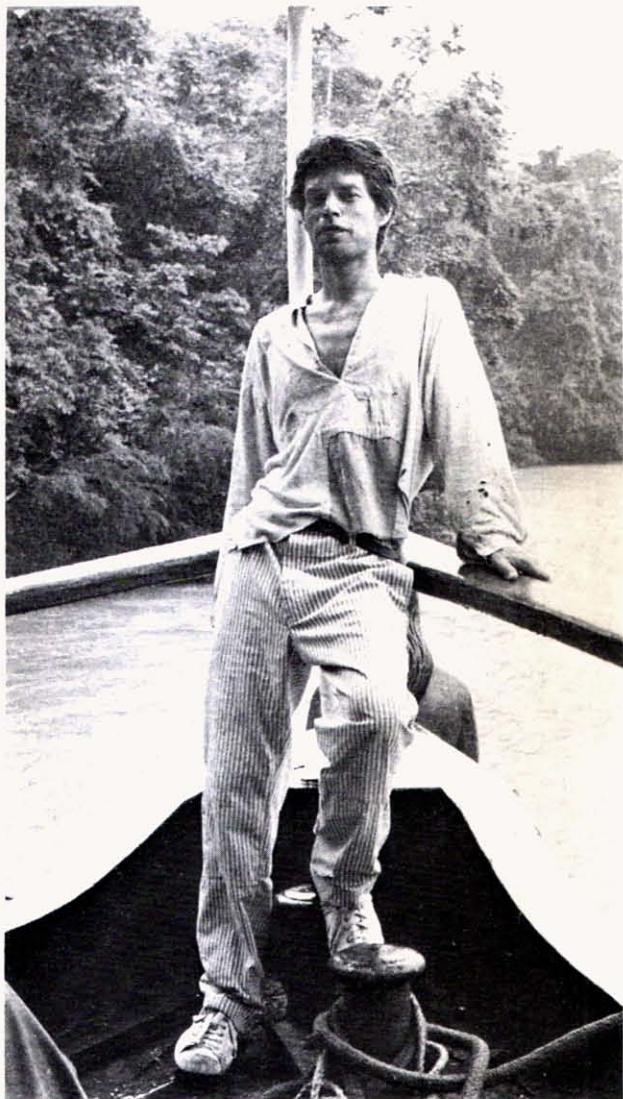


Breakfast on the last day, Herzog looks up from his coffee cup. "Les, have you ever heard of a chicken that committed suicide? One that got fed up with nature?"

Blank is shaving raw garlic into his eggs. "Why do you ask this question?"

"I don't know," says Herzog. "There are wailing rocks, and farting glaciers, but I never heard of a chicken that was so miserable it committed suicide."

The *trocha* in the hot morning sunlight is hell on earth—a stinking griddle of mud, rock, and fallen trees, with nowhere to hide from the sun or the camera, where even the driest patches are long trampled into wet muck, where there's nothing to drink and nowhere to sit down and nothing to do but reflect darkly on the fact that Herzog may have built this hell for himself, but he's making everyone else suffer in it along with him. While Indians run heavy ropes from the bow of the ship to ten wooden winches, we set up our own equipment on a damp hummock and prepare for a long wait. A loud roaring comes from the upper hillside where the D-8 is trying to pull a



© J. L. Allan/Sygma

When Mick Jagger left the film, Herzog called it "the biggest loss in my career."

heavy metal cable over the top, slipping sideways in the deep mud, treads spinning helplessly, black smoke pouring from the stack. Gosling asks Bubu, Herzog's second cameraman, if he thinks the ship will move today. "I don't think so," he says, "but I don't know so much about ships."

Presently, with his camera on the top deck of the ship, Herzog shoots details of Indians turning winches. "Forward!" he yells, and the Indians turn forward. "Back!" he yells, and the Indians turn back. But the ship doesn't move, and everyone goes back to camp for lunch.

After a long morning in the sun with nothing to drink, we're parched, but when we ask for beer, the kitchen boy tells us there isn't any. What he means, since the Germans are all drinking beer, is that there isn't any for *us*. We ask for mineral water, but we know perfectly well that Kinski is the only one who gets to drink mineral water. All there is for the likes of us is horrible *refresco*—warm, heavily sweetened, cinnamon-flavored water.

In the corner of the dining room, there's a sink with cold hand-washing water that comes from a jungle spring. I've never seen anyone drink it, but I'm dry enough to try anything.

"Werner," I ask, "is this tap water OK to drink?"

His glance is only slightly contemptuous. "All water here is good to drink," he declares, so Blank and I fill our glasses and raise them high, feeling moderately reckless.

"Who needs beer anyway?" asks Blank, trying to talk himself into it. "It just makes you fat and cantankerous."

"Here's to your health," I toast.

"And sobriety," adds Blank. We drink deep; the water is cold and crystalline, with a taste like sunshine.

Beatus, Herzog's camera assistant, looks up and sees us drinking. "What are you doing?" he cries in alarm. "You can't drink that water!"

"Werner said it was OK," I protest.

"Sure," says Beatus. "He always says the money is in the bank, too, but it's *never* in the bank."

Back at the *trocha*, Herzog walks around the ship, whomping on the hull with a big metal bolt, making different clanks and bangs and bonks, while a sound man records them all. When an especially resounding clang occurs, Herzog's face glows with pleasure.

Continual bulldozer roaring can be heard from the hilltop, so Blank sends Gosling up with a hand-held Bell and Howell camera to see what's going on. Suddenly the great ropes and pulleys running up the hill pull taut. Herzog strides excitedly up and down the slope in his bare feet, while Kinski wanders glumly in the mud, kicking at stones. Then the ropes go slack. Herzog returns to his camera, only to catch Gosling in his viewfinder. "Maureen, get down from there!" he screams. "I can't stand it when you get in the shot like that!" Gosling climbs down with bad news: The main pivot point at the top of the hill is bent over like a twig, presumably from the brief application of tension.

The heat gets worse as the afternoon passes. Herzog and Kinski get into a screaming fight on the top deck of the ship. Ropes come disconnected. Indians sit on top of their winches, swinging their legs. The bulldozer roars. Herzog stands alone, his head in his hands. The ship doesn't move.

Back in camp, after sunset, someone tries to cheer him up. "Look, you've got all the Indian shots you need. Walter is going to move the ship, and all you have to do is come back from Iquitos with a skeleton crew, shoot it, cut all the stuff together, and it'll look fine."

Herzog looks terminally weary. "The ship hasn't moved an inch," he says with disgust. "What we did today is like putting track shoes on a paralyzed man in a wheelchair. You have to shoot putting on the shoes, but then he still can't run."

In Some Language It Means Death

"All of these people here are feeling all right in Iquitos. They belong to the jungle; they belong here and they like it. I like the kind of life in Belen, too—it's a very pure kind of life. Belen is a frontier town, it's just life that has grown like jungle grows. There is no design. It's a well-disorganized place. It has a healthy disorganization and a healthy amount of rubbish."

—Werner Herzog

Continued on page 72

There's no freeze on
weapons in the escalating
special effects race.

WAR OF THE WIZARDS

Donald Chase

The audiences for special effects, as Woody Allen once said about love affairs, are like sharks: They have to keep moving forward or else they die. If the effects whiz kids don't keep them in a feeding frenzy with bigger and bloodier morsels, they're likely to go after smaller fish, like *Diner*, *Ordinary People*, and *Shoot the Moon*. Effects that aren't novel don't dazzle, and for audiences used to oversize sharks, cute robots, and world-class explosions, familiarity breeds contempt. When you've seen one spaceship as big as Manhattan drift gracefully over your shoulder into deep screen space, you've seen them all, and probably only effects junkies can tell the difference between the *Starship Enterprise*, the *Cygnus*, and the *Discovery*.

Special makeup effects artist Rob Bottin's man-into-werewolf trick in *The Howling* wowed audiences, because never before had they seen noses become snouts, nails become claws, short hair become dreadlocks, all in one take, without cutaways or dissolves. But when Rick Baker, who pioneered the system of cables, pneumatics, and bladders that made it all possible, did it himself a few months later in *An American Werewolf in London*, audiences yawned. It was old hat, although it subsequently won Baker an Oscar. Effects technology is changing so fast that before this year's blockbuster ends its first run, its spectacular effects will be destined for the dustbin of history, or the Museum of Mod-

ern Art, the fate that befell Peter Ellenshaw's *Cygnus* (from *The Black Hole*).

But there's still a lot of money in effects films, and this summer at least five of them—*Poltergeist*, *TRON*, *E.T.*, *The Thing*, and *Blade Runner*—are off and running in the special effects derby, racing for the pot of gold that waits for the winner at the end of the summer box-office rainbow.

The explosion of special effects has wreaked havoc in the once bucolic world of the artist-technicians who puttered around their studios making little clay models of gorillas and dinosaurs, painting sunsets for studio lovers and mean streets for studio cops. According to Roy Arbogast, who handled many of the effects for *Jaws* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the only prohibition was one against "telling others what you're doing or, more important, how you're doing it before the picture is released, while there's a chance of somebody beating you to the punch." Then came *Star Wars* in 1977. With its 365 separate special effects shots, and its all-time-record \$185 million in domestic rentals, George Lucas's film transformed special effects from a cottage industry to a fiercely competitive, big (or at least medium-size) business. It earned Oscars for five wunderkinder—John Dykstra, Robbie Blalack, Richard Edlund, John Stears, and Grant McCune—and set off the special effects race.

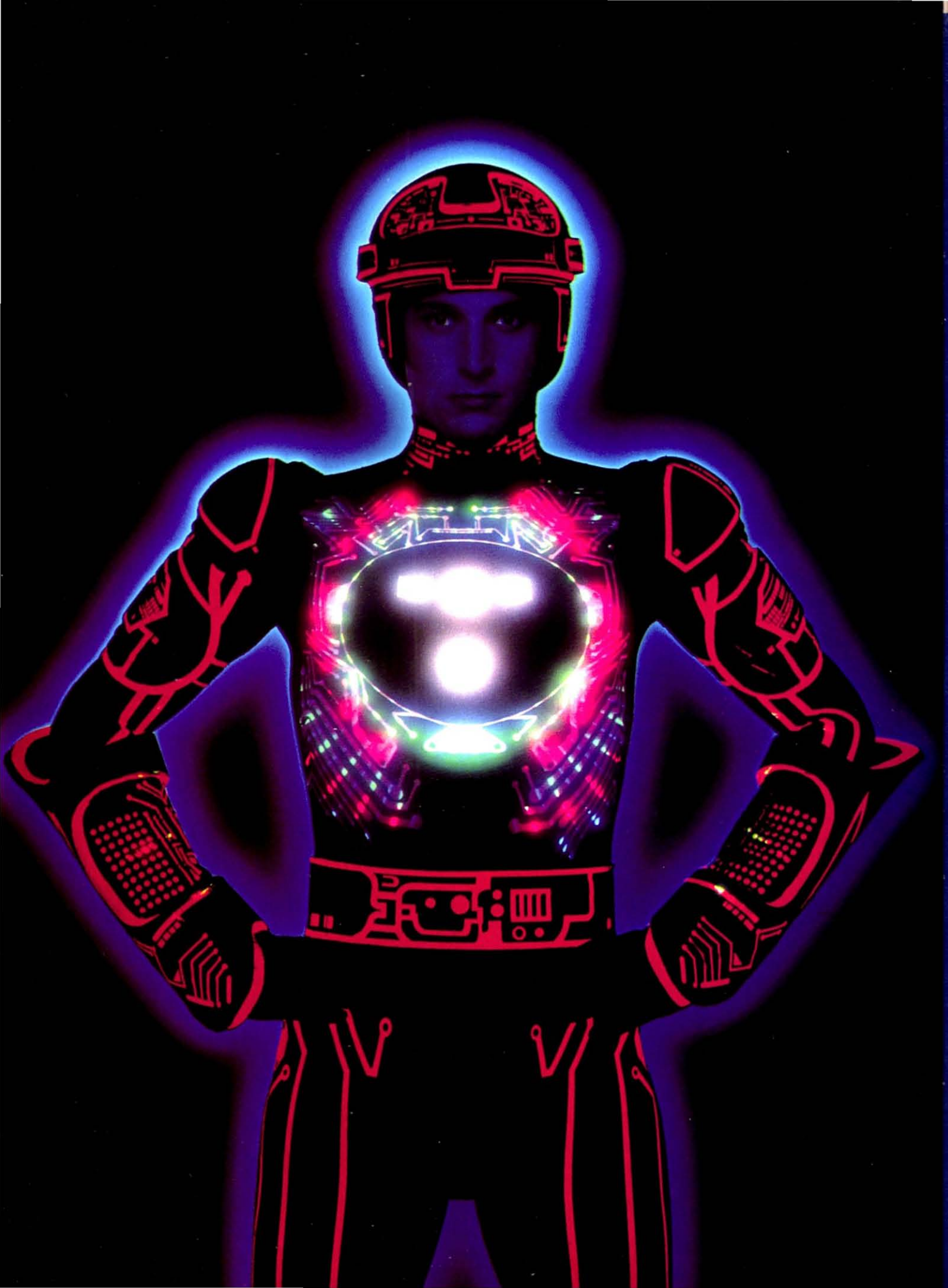
Before *Star Wars* came out, the special

effects world was a cozy one, composed of a handful of wet-behind-the-ears technobrats who gave one another a helping hand. In 1971, Dykstra worked on effects godfather-turned-director Douglas Trumbull's *Silent Running*. Trumbull recommended Dykstra to Lucas for *Star Wars*, and Dykstra brought in Blalack. Later Trumbull brought Dykstra onto *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Although this young-boy network still operates, several of the boys have opened businesses of their own, and are now in direct competition.

The effects for *Star Wars* were done by Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), a company Dykstra set up specifically for the film. When Lucasfilm moved ILM from the San Fernando Valley to San Rafael in northern California, Dykstra set up his own company, Apogee, in ILM's original headquarters. At roughly the same time, Blalack formed Praxis Film Works, also in the Valley. The three companies, along with Trumbull and Richard Yuricich's Venice, California-based Entertainment Effects Group (EEG), are generally conceded to be the effects industry's leaders.

ILM is to special effects houses what MGM was to movie studios in the thirties: big, expensively equipped, departmentalized, and noted for the glossy professionalism of its product. Add a dash of we're-the-best arrogance and you've got the giant

In TRON, computer-generated effects turn an actor into a video-game warrior.



everybody loves to hate. ILM is oriented toward computer-assisted technologies—such as the “go-motion” system, used by Dennis Muren to move the miniatures in *Dragonslayer* through stop-motion animation. The company uses “blue screen” as its fundamental technique in matting one image to another.

(In the blue-screen process, actors are shot in front of a bright blue background that is later replaced by a piece of prepared film, such as a shot of a miniature skyscraper in flames, or a matte painting of an environment. And using a VistaVision camera—in which 35mm film runs horizontally instead of vertically—effectively doubles the size of the negative image and counteracts the grain build-up that normally occurs during the construction of “composites,” made by successive camera “passes” of the same image.)

ILM does both optical, or visual, effects incorporating models or miniatures, and mechanical, or physical, effects. Optical effects are usually created in postproduction, while mechanical effects are usually shot on a sound stage during principal photography—and might include earthquakes, killer sharks, or explosions.

ILM has a guaranteed piece of the feature output of Lucasfilm. Frank Marshall, producer of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, says there was never any question of bidding his and Spielberg’s MGM production of *Poltergeist* out to other effects houses, because ILM “is the best.” *Poltergeist*, directed by Tobe Hooper, is about an average American family whose tract house is visited by increasingly violent ghosts. For the first full-scale episode of poltergeist phenomena, the entire bedroom was spun mechanically on a huge gimbal on Stage 30 at MGM and the objects flying through the air were matted in optically. Also in *Poltergeist*’s bag of tricks are a monster tornado, “ectoplasmic” ghosts, and a “bilocation” effect. Bilocation phenomena—an object disappears from one spot and instantly appears in midair rooms away—are announced by a laser-lit burst of gas, an invention of ILM’s animation department.

Douglas Trumbull has provided visual effects for films like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Close Encounters*, and *Star Trek*. His Entertainment Effects Group recently bid against ILM for Paramount’s sequel to *Star Trek*. According to Trumbull, EEG’s bid was \$1.5 million under ILM’s, but ILM got the account because of Paramount’s desire to cement the profitable association it began with Lucasfilm as dis-



The effects of summer: In The Thing, a man becomes a human torch, above, and Kurt Russell eyes the havoc wreaked by the monster, right; opposite, two children are buffeted by an unseen presence in Poltergeist; video war games come to life in TRON.



tributor of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. "For us at EEG who worked on the first *Star Trek*," Trumbull says, "it would almost have been a matter of taking the *Enterprise* model out of the crate we'd put it into two years earlier, rigging it, and beginning to shoot the next day."

"But ILM made a mistake in thinking that they could just take it out of the box and begin work. The *Enterprise* appears to be lighting itself from within as it travels through hyperspace, but in addition to the switch-operated on-board lights, there were literally hundreds of off-camera shading and modulation lights that had to be rigged. ILM asked for our help and, in fact,

some of our people spent a weekend instructing them in the hookup of the lighting system. But we eventually had to say we couldn't help them any more on this project, which they theoretically told the client—Paramount—they could do better than us. Being naive about how the *Enterprise* was lit could be very expensive."

Estimating the cost of effects, with any accuracy, is a dicey business. "Producers are always asking for something that's never been done before, but they expect you to tell them exactly how much it's going to cost," says Trumbull. "Even in situations that are fairly predictable, it may take five or ten people a few weeks to

put together a really accurate budget—and the studios don't want to spend the money to do that. So we throw out these large figures as estimated budgets and the studio tries to make a decision. And then it gives special effects a bad name if there are cost overruns."

While conceding that cost overruns have forced producers to become somewhat more effects-wise, Trumbull suggests that producers' persistent tendency to view optical effects as strictly a function of postproduction is destructively expensive. "In preproduction on Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, we built miniatures and photographed them for process plates to be used during principal photography. By choosing techniques where you can execute the work early on, you shorten the postproduction period—and therefore the amount of time that the bank loan that financed the film is accruing interest at twenty or twenty-five percent."

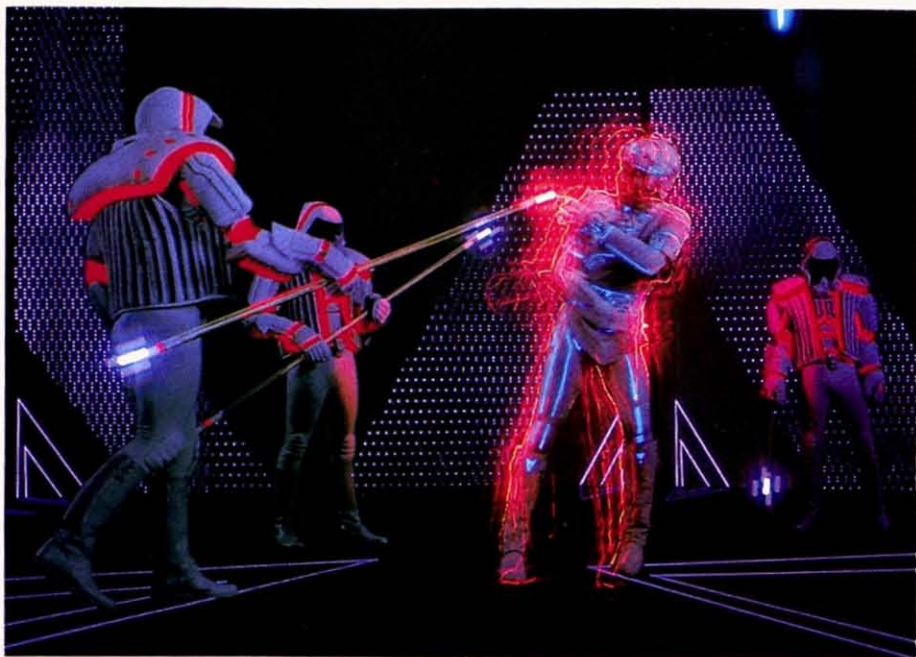
Praxis Film Works has done effects work on *Altered States*, *Wolfen*, and *Cat People*. Its president, Robbie Blalack, left Lucasfilm rather than work on *The Empire Strikes Back* because, he says, "the work in *Star Wars* tended to be repetitive in terms of technique. If you've composited planets, lasers, death stars, spaceships once, you've essentially done it for all time. I also began to feel I was hammering out concepts laid down by George Lucas, and I wanted to work on films where I would be allowed a greater creative or artistic input. For example, there's the *Cat People* scene where Nastassia Kinski walks out into the swamp and we see, from her point of view, a snake and a rabbit change color. I worked with Paul Schrader and his supervising editor, Bud Smith, in storyboarding the shots of the various animals on which I later did the color enhancement in postproduction." Praxis, like EEG, is more fine arts oriented than ILM or Apogee.

John Dykstra's Apogee relies on a combination of computer technologies and blue screen, which are both particularly well suited to space shows, and its ILM-like technological and stylistic bent is indicated by its work for television's "Battlestar Galactica" and on selected sequences of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Dykstra says that *Firefox*, the Clint Eastwood movie on which Apogee recently finished work, involved new applications of computer-assisted motion-control technology to aerial photography, "double-pass" blue-screen photography, and the integration of location photography and miniatures.

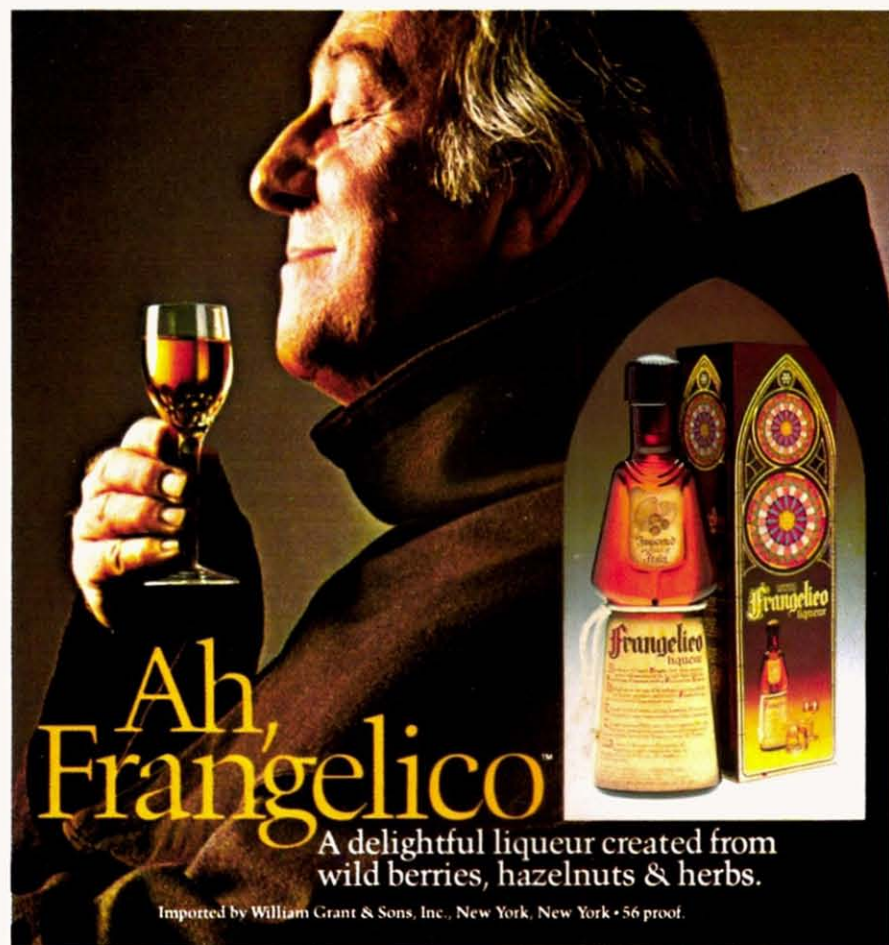
Blalack predicts that in the near future there will be a "shakeout in which one



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major and one or more minor effects studios will close. The rising cost of both live-action photography and special effects, coupled with the fact that the industry's revenues have remained fixed for the last decade, means that producers are less and less willing to risk twenty or thirty million dollars on a picture. Effects studios need to be working on at least one of those twenty-to-thirty-million-dollar pictures at a given time to remain viable."

"Small houses have specialties," says Harrison Ellenshaw, associate producer and co-supervisor of effects on Disney's *TRON*, "and they'll tell a producer they can do everything he needs with front projection—or whatever their specialty is. The truth may be that front projection is the optimum technique for only ten or twenty-five percent of the work and the rest looks lousy."

To remain competitive, small houses tend to expand the range of their services—often too quickly. Until recently, Bill Hedge was president of the Magic Lantern, the effects house that contributed the "Jews in Space" sequence to Mel Brooks's *History of the World Part I*. At its peak the company employed some fifty persons and did optical, mechanical, and special makeup and costuming work. "It's a tough, scary, expensive business," Hedge says. "You can rent anything in this town, but effects houses usually own their equipment. A basic motion-control system will run you a hundred thousand dollars, an optical printer or a good production camera like a Panaflex that much or more. Or you can spend a couple thousand building something specifically for a five-second shot and then never use it again." Noting that he "loved doing the work and hated doing the business, but had to do the business in order to do the work," Hedge feels he may have expanded too rapidly or selected his clients injudiciously. Large unpaid debts by independent producers forced him and his partners to close the Magic Lantern's doors, and he is now working as a free-lancer, with stop-motion animation as a specialty.

Sometimes, small specialty houses work together. Four special effects houses are working on *TRON*, written and directed by Steven Lisberger and produced by Donald Kushner. *TRON* spends roughly an hour of its running time in an electronic game world for which each "character" was created by the back-light compositing, or painting-with-light, technique—which has never before been used in a feature film. One firm did the real-world-to-electronic-world transitions, and three other houses

Thinking About Effects

Special effects are illusions. In fact, it's essential to the sense of awe, surprise, and wonder in sci-fi and horror that we know this. We have to know both that we are being tricked and experience the pleasurable illusion of the trick. In sci-fi, fantasy, and horror, what we are seeing often doesn't exist, so when we do see it, it "exists" even more spectacularly for us.

One would think this would lead to a greater sense of heightened realism for the entire experience. Ironically, this is not the case. Since on the deepest level we know these things don't exist, we transfer our ultimate wonder from what we see to the wondrous machine, the movies themselves that make the impossible real.

Special effects stress the thrill of spectacle, and thereby make us aware of movie technology. Effects films are advertisements for themselves. The most powerful images of the big sci-fi fantasy films are often self-referential. The mother ship of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is not just a cathedral, to which it has often been compared, but a highly ornate, old-fashioned movie palace. The use of François Truffaut in a major role merely accentuates the fact that Steven Spielberg's film is about directing films, and when the glittering mother ship finally floats to Earth at the end of the film, it is hard to avoid comparing it to *Close Encounters* itself—long awaited, enormously expensive, daz-

zingly complex and spectacular, ultimately optimistic and redemptive.

As in sci-fi, the motivating myths of current horror movies are other movies. *The Howling* is filled with reflections on *The Wolf Man*. *An American Werewolf in London* reduces the Scottish pubgoers to background material and an occasion for the plot to begin; in the foreground are David Naughton and pal reminiscing about *The Wolf Man*. The old movies expressed a fear of sexuality; that's why *Dracula*, *King Kong*, and *The Wolf Man* seemed so powerful. Transformation into beasts articulated that fear. However, in the permissive atmosphere of today's films, the sexual problem evaporates. Naughton is altogether too sunny, free, and sexually unrepressed to need his demon. *American Werewolf* handles its shifts in tone and its varying kinds of sequences nicely; still, the mythic power that comes through has its origins not in sexual repression but in movie lore and technology.

A number of these films raise serious issues in their plots that the effects sequences elaborate. They act much the way musical numbers in musicals do—reflecting, pulling together, and defining material in the narrative, even offering a kind of transcendent vision beyond the often-mundane plot.

Some sci-fi fantasy films have acted as blueprints for the future, telling us that certain things are possible: the moon voyages in *Woman in the Moon* (1929) or, more darkly, atomic warfare in *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). The destructive and apocalyptic creature movies of the fifties articulated our ambivalence about technology. On the one hand, the films projected a fear of the misuse of technology,

chiefly the Bomb; on the other, they induced a sense of excitement and elation through the power of the special effects sequences, leading us through a kind of purgation to an overall contemplation of the possibilities of technology. Our control of movie technology seems to hint that eventually we can control the larger technology as well.

Special effects are always on the verge of detaching themselves from the narrative, upstaging characters and plot, either repressing their development or usurping our interest. They always try to stand out and stand alone. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, special effects permeated the whole film, even determining its rhythm and tone. Its successors—*Star Trek*, *Superman*, *Superman II*, *Close Encounters*, *The Empire Strikes Back*—did not follow its experimental narrative form, but they too allowed effects to saturate their plots, and narrative became fragmented. (Only *Star Wars* managed to maintain a strong plot line that propelled the movie forward.) Coppola's *One From the Heart* so emphasized film technology that the plot and characters seemed as if they were being viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. The film was best enjoyed as it presented itself—an exercise in the state of the art.

With talk of Imax, holograms, and other new technological refinements, we may be on the verge of seeing narrative disappear altogether, defining our theatrical experience as one in which we go exclusively to be thrilled by the latest technospectacles, much like Cinerama in the fifties. Ironically, it may be that one oft-stated goal of the avant-garde, to annihilate narrative, is on the agenda of Hollywood itself. —Albert J. LaValley

worked on the flying objects and backgrounds in the computer-simulated game-world segment. The advantage of computer-simulated imagery is that it obviates the need for expensive sets, either life-size or miniature.

If *Star Wars* made optical effects a growth area, then *The Exorcist* signaled the emergence of special makeup effects as a field distinct both from makeup and from special mechanical effects. Though Rick Baker's studio, EFX, has seven full-time employees, most special makeup effects artists work as independents, hiring their own free-lancers as

needed. Baker has reservations about the continual demands for bigger, better, and more spectacular effects. "If you can afford to, you just don't do the films that go against your grain," says Baker. "I like to scare people, but I don't want to make them sick."

After his success with *The Howling*, Rob Bottin went on to do *The Thing*. Bill Lancaster's script indicated what the film's centuries-old extraterrestrial menace might do; however, apart from suggesting that the creature could perfectly imitate any life form, the screenplay left its looks to the imagination of the makeup effects artist. After toying briefly with the idea of

a single, "stable" monster makeup, director John Carpenter gave Bottin the green light to create between twelve and twenty separate makeups, and he gave him an all-time-high makeup budget of \$1.5 million. The film also employed Roy Arbogast to stage its mechanical effects, which include an explosion that demolishes an Antarctic army base.

Before Bottin became involved in *The Thing*, Arbogast was slated to animate the monster. But he apparently had plenty to do as head of his own nine-man mechanical effects unit and relinquished direct involvement in the monster with good grace. Other mechanical effects artists feel that

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the gains in makeup and optical effects have been made at their expense and resist what they regard as makeup or optical imperialism.

Steven Spielberg says that when there was a choice between doing a particular *Poltergeist* effect mechanically, on the sound stage, or optically, in postproduction, he and Frank Marshall tried to balance cost-effectiveness against effectiveness on screen. "Sometimes," Spielberg relates, "a floor effects person would raise his hand and say, 'I know what you're planning to spend on this optical effect. I bet I can do it cheaper physically, with wires.' So there's some wire work in *Poltergeist* where it was possible to light the scene so the wires wouldn't show. Or Richard Edlund would say, 'Why are you struggling to create that tornado with wind machines and fuller's earth? Let us have a go at it in postproduction.' And sure enough, they would give me a great tornado. At ILM, ninety people attend dailies, and the animation department, say, will be trying to get more oohs and aahs than the miniature effects department."

The star status conferred on the special effects whiz kids has created a certain amount of tension between them and production designers, cinematographers, directors, and actors, among others. Rick Baker was disappointed with the intentionally banal lighting that director John Landis wanted for the man-into-beast scene in *An American Werewolf in London*. But Rob Bottin is said to have controlled the lighting for his similar scenes in *The Howling*, and on *The Thing*, his desire for lighting that would enhance his rubber monsters was weighed against cinematographer Dean Cundey's desire for realism. "To make a fantasy real is the aim of *The Thing*," says Cundey. "Rob is very knowledgeable about the kind of lighting that makes rubber look good or believable—it's generally dark with a lot of shadow and tiny dots of illumination here and there—but that kind of lighting forewarns the audience that Something Terrible Is About to Happen. Also, it's sometimes hard to justify in terms of what the characters are doing in a room just before the monster appears. Our solution was to use as much practical light as possible. Using the ceiling fixtures in a room or hallway as a light source, for example, gives the audience a sense of reality and also provides some shadowy corners."

Special effects sequences are ordinarily laid out shot by shot on storyboards before a foot of film is exposed. The design of the storyboards for *The Thing*, for example,



In Steven Spielberg's *E.T.*, a spaceship hovers over a tract house—a scene reminiscent of the spectacular finale of *Close Encounters*.

ensured that the actors and the monster were not included in the same composition (though they might be in the same scene), so that most of the time-consuming monster photography could be done after the actors had gone off salary. The separation of actor and effect common in the shooting of effects films is distressing to many performers.

At the North Carolina location of *Brainstorm* a month before her death, Natalie Wood said, "So often in special effects films, you're registering fright at something that's not even *there*, or the characters are so secondary to the effects that you might as well not be there." The film, on which Douglas Trumbull has finished principal photography after a shutdown following the tragedy, interested Wood "because the personal story is as important as the special effects. In fact, the effects, which deal with the mind, the emotions, and the memory, are used to *tell* the personal story."

Are effects and the "personal," intimate dimension of films destined to be forever at odds? Effects artists are indeed alert to the danger of viewers ODing on lasers, ghosts, and tidal waves. "Good movies come from good scripts, not good monsters," says

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Bottin. "Scale," adds *Poltergeist* coproducer Marshall, "is not as important as skill. If we got too big in the effects area, we might threaten the believability of our story, which, after all, is about average Americans." According to Richard Taylor, co-supervisor (with Harrison Ellenshaw) of *TRON*'s special effects, "They can be too powerful, in the sense of eating too much candy. One of the design constraints has been to keep them subdued and confined to a context that works dramatically." *Brainstorm*, if successful in integrating its story of marital discord with its effects and action-adventure plot, could point the way toward the non-boy's-book effects movie.

"Through advances in electronics and optics," John Dykstra says, "we've improved the cost-to-product quotient to the extent that it's often more effective to shoot a film on a sound stage than on location. We've simulated real environments for *Firefox*, and I foresee increased use of special effects in 'conventional' scenes in 'conventional' pictures"—such as the modestly budgeted human-interest material of which television may become the sole purveyor. In fact, for the ABC miniseries *Inside the Third Reich*, Introvision, a new, sophisticated system that combines in-camera plates of dimensional miniatures with live action, created various settings of the 1939 Reichs chancellery from five photographs of the original.

Finally, there's the school of thought holding that computer-generated imagery will eventually supplant all other forms of optical effects, conceivably at the same time that most of the industry will shift from film to videotape and other electronic camera systems.

"I don't think special effects are a trend whose future is dependent on the continued popularity of the genres that have used effects extensively in recent years," Steven Spielberg says. "Warren Beatty and Diane Keaton will never be synthesized electronically. But there will be a day when Warren Beatty and Diane Keaton will be running through an early twentieth-century Moscow that's entirely computer synthesized, when it will be possible to create an entire civilization at the cost of two days' shooting."

In other words, the future of special effects may be limited only by man's imagination and the technology needed to give it substance. Which are no limitations at all. 

Donald Chase has written on film for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Esquire*, and *Horizon*, and is the author of the AFI-sponsored book *Filmmaking: The Collaborative Art*.



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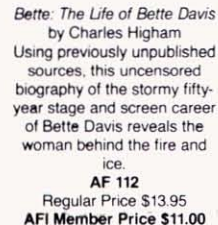
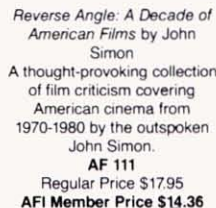
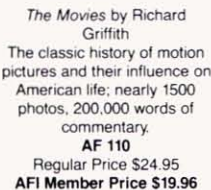
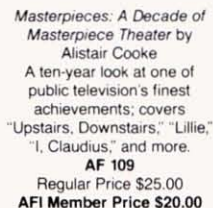
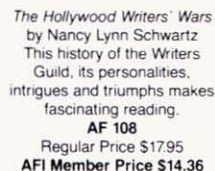
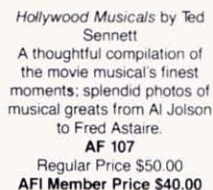
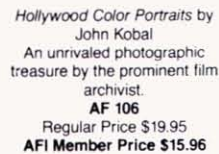
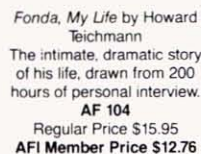
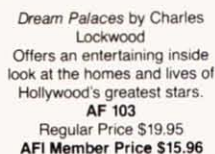
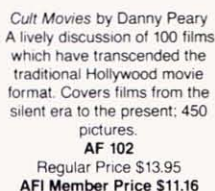
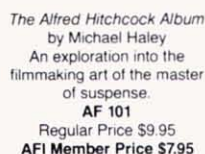
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THE VIDEO SCENE

Trial by Tape

Jodie Foster's not the only video witness. Cassettes in court are becoming as common as criminals.

Michael J. Weiss



The cinematography was crude, the action slow, and the sound absent. Nevertheless, the production elicited the kind of rapt audience attention usually reserved for Oscar-winning extravaganzas. When the fifteen-minute videotape concluded, the star of the show received an award for several hundred thousand dollars.

Sound like He'llollywood? In fact, the scene took place recently in a northern Virginia courtroom, where the central character was a handsome twenty-year-old ex-gymnast who'd become a paraplegic after a tragic fall. As part of the presentation in a lawsuit seeking damages for the youth, trial attorney Andrew Greenwald showed a day-in-the-life documentary to dramatize his client's injuries. The color short opened with the young man struggling to move from bed to wheelchair and closed with an upbeat shot of him patting his German shepherd—a sort of cinema verité without tears. Because video evidence is inadmissible if presented in a prejudicial way, the tape carefully avoided any heart-wrenching scenes.

Just the facts, however, were enough to win the client a hefty settlement, as they have every time Greenwald has used a day-in-the-life presentation in a negligence suit. "Now, I can't tell you for certain that it's because of the video," the attorney says from his office, "but I think it always has a substantial impact on the court if the case involves a severe disability. I hate to get trite, but a picture is worth a thousand words." And, in many courtrooms, hundreds of thousands of dollars as well.

Day-in-the-life documentaries are part of an expanding portfolio of ways attorneys use video in today's courtrooms. Although video technology has been utilized for some time to provide expert testimony from medical witnesses otherwise unavailable, lawyers throughout the nation are turning more and more to minicams in showing confessions, lineups, even the trail of blood leading from the scene of a crime. In Arizona, Idaho, and Pennsylvania, for example, attorneys are permitted to videotape pretrial arraignments to preserve witnesses' statements. In Ohio, attorneys have recorded entire civil trials, turning sleep-inducing lawsuits into snappy two-hour productions that would make Perry Mason proud.

In the past two years, federal regulations have been simplified to allow lawyers to introduce video evidence into civil and criminal proceedings. According to Steve Haraczak, chief spokesman for the 44,000-member Association of Trial Lawyers of America, "More and more attorneys are using video to bring graphic information to juries. And fewer and fewer judges are objecting to the legitimacy of TV testimony in court."

In Oakland, California, recently, a jury convicted a twenty-six-year-old man of first-degree murder in the 1976 killings of

For \$200 to \$300, a professional video technician will record the signing of a will in full color and sound and, generally, in a funereal ambience.

his mother, father, and grandfather. A thirty-second segment of tape from "60 Minutes," in which the man confessed to the slayings, was the key evidence the prosecution presented in the case.

Until well into the television age, visual demonstrations in trials were limited to physical evidence like skeletal models or severed limbs wrapped in brown paper. If a witness couldn't make it into court for some compelling reason, his testimony might be written down and read in court or, more recently, tape-recorded and played back. Naturally, most judges and lawyers (not to mention juries) believed there was no substitute for a warm body on the witness stand.

But in 1979, a four-year Michigan State University study found that jurors were better able to retain information from a television tape than from "live" testimony. And in some instances—say, if a witness were soft-spoken and reserved—a video deposition made a more favorable impression on jurors than a live appearance.

Many legal observers believe there are also intangible benefits to courtroom television. "Jurors love video because it is different," says Jacob Levin, a circuit court judge in Prince George's County, Maryland. Wheeling a television monitor into a courtroom breaks up the monotony of a lengthy lawsuit, he notes. "An ordinary civil trial is the most boring thing in the world. So if you can make the trial more interesting—if you can tape an X ray or show some blood or something dramatic—it helps your side of the case, whether it's for the plaintiff or the defense. Video makes the jurors sympathetic." And it keeps them awake.

Unlike written testimony read aloud by sonorous attorneys, videotape preserves the demeanor of witnesses so a jury can weigh their credibility against their gestures, pauses, and twitches. During the 1975 trial of Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme for her assassination attempt on President Gerald Ford, the president appeared on tape before Sacramento jurors. In April 1978, President Jimmy Carter appeared on tape to describe how he, as governor of Georgia, had refused to exchange gambling-raid tip-offs for the legislative support of a state senator. With video depositions, the sitting presidents could remain in the White House while telling their side in court.

This March, actress Jodie Foster provided videotaped testimony for the trial of John W. Hinckley, Jr., accused of shooting President Ronald Reagan outside the

Washington Hilton hotel last year. Prosecutors charge that Hinckley shot the president in an attempt to win Foster's attention; they taped her statements because the actress was expected to be in Europe when the trial took place.

Another advantage of videotape is that it's timeless, a special boon for malpractice attorneys. According to Marilyn Roberts, research director for the Williamsburg-based National Center for State Courts, "If you have a dying client and want to preserve the testimony so the jury can experience the personality, video is a blessing." It can also be an oddity that creates headlines like the recent *Washington Post* shocker: "Dead Man Wins \$600,000."

Beyond the legal maneuvering, making a videotaped deposition doesn't require much effort. A stationary camera is pointed at a witness seated between the prosecutor and the defendant's attorney, who alternate with questions and objections. The charge: about \$250 for a two-hour tape.

But producing a day-in-the-life film can take days of work and can cost a thousand dollars. Milton Lowenstein, one of the pioneers of legal videomaking (he started his business in 1975), says that each tape must be "informative and entertaining without a lot of razzmatazz." At Omnivideo—his Arlington, Virginia, firm—the courtly seventy-five-year-old has produced hundreds of day-in-the-life documentaries, alternating as cameraman, editor, and expert witness.

For a typical shoot, Lowenstein dispatches a two-man crew with a JVC-71 camera, using three-quarter-inch color film. Their mission is to condense an entire day's routine into a fifteen- to thirty-minute tape: the subject awakening, taking a bath, cooking breakfast, undergoing therapy, and so on. Lowenstein admits that it's no Cecil B. DeMille production: There are no makeup artists, no propmen, no scripts, and few camera variations besides close-ups at the sink or a long shot down the hall. The only arty shot in one recent Omnivideo production was a through-the-kitchen-window view of a young man washing dishes.

"Sure they're boring. We don't want them to look like studio setups," explains Lowenstein, who worked as an MGM sound man in the thirties. "We just want a record of what's going on. Judges don't like overdubbing or anything that smacks of dramatization. Even using two cameras is considered contrived." Lowenstein is care-

ful not to show any X-rated nudity in his films; he makes judicious use of towels in the bed-to-bath sequences. "Sometimes you get Holy Roller Baptists as jurors," he remarks, "and you don't want to alienate them."

More often, videotaping is used to lend credence to controversial evidence—like testimony from a hypnotized witness. When Washington, D.C., trial lawyer Michael Abelson accepted the case of a young woman motorist unable to recall who caused a head-on collision in which she was injured, he taped a hypnotist helping his client remember the particulars of the accident. For forty-five minutes, as a single camera recorded the scene in the hypnotist's office, the young woman relived the crash in a peaceful trance. And when the hypnotist guided her thoughts to seconds before impact, she recalled that the other car had swerved into her lane.

Of course, opposing attorneys objected to the videotape, calling the production "Abelson's magic show." But the U.S. District Court judge disagreed. "By seeing the girl had not moved a muscle in forty-five minutes," says Abelson, "it was clear that she was under hypnosis and telling the truth. Without the tape, the judge would have thrown out the evidence in a minute." With it, the jury ended up awarding the young woman \$95,000.

Thanks to America's overlitigious society, videotape has been used in other ways, like capturing an errant spouse in a compromising position, to win a domestic dispute. Lately, attorneys have even begun videotaping the signing of wills to safeguard against later challenges by unhappy relatives. For \$200 to \$300, a professional video technician will record the signing of a will in full color and sound and, generally, in a funereal ambience. With an attorney and two witnesses present, the testator signs the will and then says a few words to show future viewers that he's of sound mind.

It's not unusual for an elderly testator to end the taping with a personal message beyond love for a sister or advice for the kids. One crusty Maryland millionaire concluded the videotaping of his will signing by announcing, "And to my nephew, I leave only one dollar, with the added instruction that if the son of a bitch comes into court to contest the will, I want the bailiff to personally throw him out." Then there was the knowing wife who recited a poem for her husband at the end of her taped will signing: "And please when all

my songs are sung/Don't fall for someone cute and young."

Although videotaped will signings and the like are still considered frivolous novelties in many legal circles, instructional television programs for lawyers are being taken seriously. Over the past decade, a half-dozen U.S. companies have started producing educational cassettes on legal subjects ranging from how to prepare an opening statement to how to win an appeal. Home International Theater, a production house based in Portland, Oregon, markets its Video-Law series to law firms and libraries, charging \$150 for a two-hour show. The programs not only feature re-created courtroom trials but also star practicing attorneys and judges in the lead roles. Not to be mistaken for the real-life theatrics of "The People's Court," Video-Law jurors and witnesses are portrayed by actors.

Actually, there is at least one jurisdiction in the country where complete trials are videotaped—and no one belongs to the Screen Actors Guild. In Erie County, Ohio, civil court judge James L. McCrystal has presided over some two hundred cases completely prerecorded on tape and presented to juries as television productions. Attorneys give their opening and closing remarks live, but present all intervening testimony on television monitors. "We rarely see a live doctor testifying in the courthouse any more," says McCrystal, who's championed the idea of prerecorded videotaped trials in Erie County since his first one in 1971. "Now they're all on video."

The judge sees three major benefits in videotaping whole trials: It takes less time, because it cuts out technical conferences at the bench; it makes trials less confusing by editing out the diversionary objections; and it frees court calendars, since there's no waiting to gather every witness into a courthouse at once. And McCrystal has proved video's effectiveness in his own courtroom. Since 1975 he's reduced his backlog of county civil cases by thirty-six percent and at the same time increased his filing load by eighteen percent. County attorneys prepare for the television trials by using a three-camera studio at the local bar association offices. And they're able to complete trials within months rather than years. "We recently had a wrongful-death case of \$90,000 for a high school girl," says McCrystal. "The verdict came in ninety days after the case was filed and less than six months from the date of death. Now, you can't beat that anywhere."

There are a number of reasons why videotaping trials has not yet become a widespread practice. Resistance has come from all corners of the courtroom. Many judges fear that videotaped depositions will undermine courtroom decorum. "What kind of mood do you get when a witness is prerecorded in some lawyer's back room,

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A guide to motion picture features mentioned in this issue that are available on videocassette or videodisc. (C) denotes Beta/VHS cassette distributor. (L) Laservision optical disc. (S) SelectaVision CED disc. Titles available in stereo are indicated by (St). For further information, refer to the Distributor Directory.*

NEWSREEL

Citizen Kane (RKO), 1941, 120 min., B/W. Nostalgia Merchant (C); RCA (S).
Hearts and Minds (Touchstone), 1974, 112 min., color. Paramount (C).
Vanishing Point (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1971, 98 min., color. Fox (C).

THE VIDEO SCENE

Endless Love (Universal), 1981, 115 min., color. MCA (C).
Fort Apache, The Bronx (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1981, 123 min., color. Vestron (C).
I Spit on Your Grave, 1980, 98 min., color. Wizard (C).
Single Room Furnished (Crown International), 1967, 95 min., color. Video Communications (C).
Texas Chain Saw Massacre (New Line), 1974, 86 min., color. Wizard (C).
The Wizard of Oz (MGM), 1939, 101 min., color. CBS (C).

DIALOGUE ON FILM

Harry and Walter Go to New York (Columbia), 1976, 120 min., color. Columbia (C).
Kramer vs. Kramer (Columbia), 1979, 105 min., color. Columbia (C).
Ordinary People (Paramount), 1980, 125 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).
The Rose (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1979, 134 min., color. Fox (C).

WHY IS THIS MAN SMIRKING?

The Jerk (Universal), 1979, 94 min., color. MCA (C).
The Killers (Universal), 1964, 95 min., color. MCA (C).
Suspicion (RKO), 1941, 99 min., B/W. Nostalgia Merchant (C).
White Heat (Warner Bros.), 1949, 114 min., B/W. VidAmerica (C).

MY DINNER WITH BARRY

American Graffiti (Universal), 1973, 112 min., color. MCA (C).
... And Justice for All (Columbia), 1979, 120 min., color. Columbia (C).
Breaking Away (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1979, 100 min., color. Fox (C).
High Anxiety (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1977, 92 min., color. Fox (C).

WAR OF THE WIZARDS

Altered States (Warner Bros.), 1980, 102 min., color. Warner (C).
The Exorcist (Warner Bros.), 1973, 120 min., color. Warner (C).
Silent Running (Universal), 1971, 90 min., color. MCA (C).
2001: A Space Odyssey (MGM), 1968, 141 min., color. CBS (C).
Wolfen (Warner Bros.), 1980, 102 min., color. Warner (C).

THINKING ABOUT EFFECTS

An American Werewolf in London (Universal), 1981, 97 min., color. MCA (C).
Close Encounters of the Third Kind (Columbia), 1977, 137 min., color. Columbia (C).
Dracula (Universal), 1931, 75 min., B/W. MCA (C).
The Howling (Avco Embassy), 1981, 81 min., color. Fox (C).
King Kong (RKO), 1933, 105 min., B/W. Nostalgia Merchant (C); RCA (S).
Superman (Warner Bros.), 1978, 128 min., color. Warner (C).
2001: A Space Odyssey (MGM), 1968, 141 min., color. CBS (C).

TRAILERS

Bronco Billy (Warner Bros.), 1980, 118 min., color. Warner (C).
The Cannonball Run (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1981, 95 min., color. Vestron (C).
The Godfather (Paramount), 1972, 171 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).
Grease (Paramount), 1978, 110 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).
The In-Laws (Warner Bros.), 1979, 103 min., color. Warner (C).
Smokey and the Bandit (Universal), 1977, 96 min., color. MCA (C).
Star Trek: The Motion Picture (Paramount), 1980, 132 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).
Time After Time (Warner Bros.), 1979, 112 min., color. Warner (C).
The Warriors (Paramount), 1979, 94 min., color. Paramount (C).

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Apocalypse Now (Paramount), 1979, 153 min., color. Paramount (C).
It's a Wonderful Life (RKO), 1946, 125 min., color. Nostalgia Merchant (C).

Distributor Directory

Columbia Pictures Home Entertainment 711 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10022, (212) 751-4400.
CBS Home Video 1700 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, (212) 975-1700.
MCA Distributing Corp. 70 Universal City Plaza, Universal City, CA 91608, (213) 508-4518.
Nostalgia Merchant 6255 Sunset Blvd., Suite 1019, Hollywood, CA 90028, (800) 421-4495.
Paramount Home Video 5451 Marathon St., Hollywood, CA 90038, (213) 621-6000.
RCA SelectaVision 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020, (212) 621-6000.
Twentieth Century-Fox Video 23434 Industrial Park Court, Farmington Hills, MI 48024, (313) 477-6066.
Vestron Video 911 Hope St., Box 4000, Stamford, CT 06907, (203) 358-0000.
VidAmerica Inc. 235 E. 55th St., New York, NY 10022, (800) 223-1318.
Video Communications 6555 E. Skelly Dr., Tulsa, OK 74145, (800) 331-4077.
Warner Home Video 75 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10019, (212) 484-6119.
Wizard Video 7000 N. Austin Ave., Niles, IL 60648, (312) 561-2500.

*Information provided by the National Video Clearinghouse. (516) 364-3686.

maybe with a bottle of beer just out of camera view?" asks one Kentucky judge. The National Shorthand Reporters Association has declared its opposition to videotaped trials because they would take jobs away from its thirteen thousand members. "It's our position that there's still a need for written transcripts to supplement video depositions," says a spokeswoman.


For some attorneys, resistance to television technology is tied less to employment than to ego. With video cameras forcing them to sit still while interviewing witnesses, there would be less chance to play William Jennings Bryan or F. Lee Bailey. Still others worry that on videotape their opponents might project more star quality, a la "Judd for the Defense."

Despite these fears, it seems likely that television cameras and monitors will one day be found in every courthouse and law firm in the nation, though few legal experts believe this will occur in the near future. As Judge McCrystal ruefully observes, "Some members of the legal profession are one hundred percent in favor of progress and one thousand percent opposed to change."

Michael J. Weiss is a free-lance writer living in Washington, D.C., along with thirty-five thousand practicing attorneys.

MONDO VIDEO

from page 20

cassettes. One can be sure that Jayne, from her grave, would have approved of Cimber's direction of his new protégé. Pia even squeals when she runs. Far be it from me to suggest that Pia Zadora is the new Jayne Mansfield, but it is unarguable that she is the most aggressively manufactured and marketed new starlet since the fifties. Although Pia startled the Hollywood community by winning the Golden Globe as Best New Star of 1981, she actually made her screen debut in *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians* at about the age of eight. Since ripening into a sultry version of Linda Blair, Miss Zadora, goddess, has become spokeswoman for Dubonnet, a singer, and now, well, a movie star acting right along with Orson Welles in her new movie. Orson Welles! One pales at the thought of her husband's unlimited bank account. Even Pia commented to the *London Times*, "Rik told me early on that I could spend all the money he had and he would let me know in good time when there was nothing left." I hope and pray that Pia Zadora will become a huge American movie star. I know I'd kill to work with her. And I'd like Joey Heatherton to play her mother. 

Filmmaker John Waters (*Pink Flamingos*, *Polyester*) has recently completed his autobiography, *Shock Value*, available from Delta Books.



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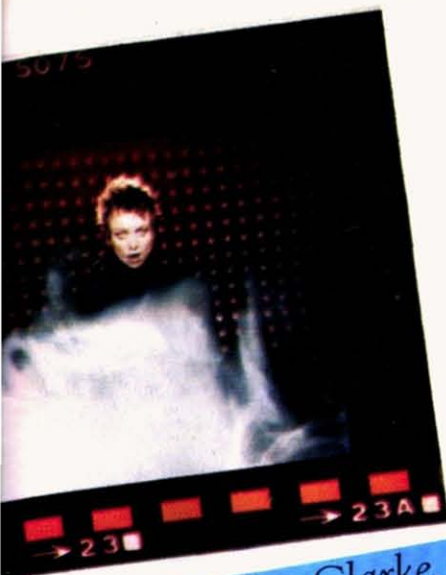


Video performance is making strange bedfellows of Rob



Scenes from Laurie Anderson's videotape, O Superman.





Altman, Shirley Clarke, and Laurie Anderson.

Alexis Greene

Video and performance have been courting each other ever since the Sony Corporation first brought the portapak to our shores. With the encouragement of cable cultural channels and cassette and disc manufacturers, the relationship seems ripe for marriage.

Theater, dance, and music come to video with unique personalities and problems, and video looks differently at each form. Although some artists are content merely to record their performances in video, others make strenuous efforts to adapt their stage acts to the peculiar requirements of the camera.

Performance artist Laurie Anderson's work is a perfect example of the new partnership between performance and electronic media. Her pieces are rooted in classic musical rhythms, but at the same time gleefully exploit the latest in electronic sound. Her songs and stories are full of private and personal references, yet they thrive on the symbols of American culture, which she frequently criticizes. A performance piece by Anderson may find her sitting onstage at the keys of a Vocoder, with one gesturing hand throwing a silhouette onto a screen. In her four-part work *United States*, she plays a neon violin while behind her a blow-up of the Statue of Liberty is superimposed on a film of the American flag whirling around in a clothes dryer. "The thing I like about performance art," says Anderson, "is that nobody really knows what it is. It refers to some kind of hybrid and can really encompass almost anything you want: talking, gesture, some kind of movement, sound, maybe music."

In 1981, Warner Bros. Records released a song from *United States*, "O Superman," which rocketed to the top of the charts in

Britain. On the heels of that success, Warners asked Anderson to make a videotape for the song (promotion tapes are distributed free by record companies to video-music cable channels and nightclubs). Anderson had "messed around" with portapaks and worked with German, French, and Belgian television, but this was her first chance to create a tape from start to finish.

She and her crew had little time: They shot in one day (with a single camera) and edited in one day. Most of the effects seen in this striking eight-minute-and-twenty-five-second videotape were created live, as in her stage performance. For example, the Chinese red that periodically suffuses the screen was achieved by flooding the area behind Anderson with a red light. To create the red image of an arm with a clenched fist, Anderson made a perfect shadow by putting her arm in a beam of arc light, and wherever she created shadow, the red would show through. The light shining from her mouth at one point is one especially designed for her that she uses in performance.

At times, Anderson felt there was loss of balance in adapting her stage act for tape. On the stage, she was the commentator; on tape, she became the center of the piece. Attempting to compensate for the loss of her commentator role, Anderson included a superimposed shot of herself in the upper right-hand corner of the screen. "That's my favorite part of the tape," she says. "Something concrete that I really like." She wants to take the idea back to the live performance, although, ironically, it may not work well onstage.

Anderson also discovered that the electronic sounds which seem so unusual in her live performances lose power in a medium that's already electronic. "I use a harmoni-

zer, which raises or lowers the pitch of the voice in real time. And that's startling in a live situation, because the wrong voice is coming out of somebody. By the time that makes it to videotape, it's a little less startling, mostly because people are so used to electronics changing everything anyway that they say, 'Oh, they did that in the studio.'"

She found, too, that images which have certain meanings in the live piece do not convey the same meanings in the tape. For example, part one of *United States*, called *Americans on the Move*, is about transportation, and the dominant image is an arc, seen as a windshield wiper projected on a screen, or a hand waving good-bye in a metronomic beat. Part two, from which "O Superman" comes, is the sociopolitical section. The axis of movement is up and down, within a circle, which Anderson uses to signify centrality, a sense of place. Such gestures as the arm with a clenched fist, or hammers moving up and down, suggest ideas about work.

After she transferred these images to tape, she sensed that much of the resonance had been lost. "What is this circle? You know, it just looked like some kind of yin-and-yang thing to me when I finished the tape, because it appears with no motivation. It's just... the beginning of the tape." She adjusted intellectually, allowing herself to find new meanings "without all those other ideas hovering around." For Anderson, the tape takes on a new Oriental mood—"flat, a Balinese feel to it... I think it has an entity," she says, "but it's divorced from the live performance."

When video meets dance, there are similar translation problems. A three-dimensional performance suddenly becomes a two-dimensional image. In a theater, we

perceive the distance between dancers at the front of the stage and those at the rear. Video flattens out this space; bodies lose contour. Choreographer George Balanchine has said that on tape, "dancers don't go away and come back again, they only get bigger and smaller."

In live dance, the floor seems to exert a

and-dance conundrum. In *Fractions*, a dance created in 1978 specifically for video, Cunningham approached the depth problem by having something happening in the foreground and something else in the background, "but it never stays fixed," says Atlas. "Part of Merce's style is to have a constantly fluid space, which is unre-

be apart as much as they were together." She achieved her goal by lighting her two dancers in "limbo" white, creating a romantic, slightly desolate effect. Soft wipes move the female dancer from one side of the screen to another, now in reach of her partner, now just missing his grasp.

But Tharp was more daring in *Short*

"All of this is theater that we're talking about," says Shirley Clarke.

pull on moving bodies. In video space, where there is no gravity, there is no fixed point to which bodies can relate, only the flat foreground of the screen. To make matters worse, the small video picture accommodates pairs and threesomes better than groups. A long shot that tries to include the entire corps de ballet will succeed only in making the figures look minute.

Choreographers and television directors have tried to merge dance and video in a variety of ways. During the PBS "Dance in America" series, producer-director Merrill Brockway used "forced perspective" lines on the dance floor to give the illusion of greater distance and depth. He used high camera angles to show upstage and downstage movement, and cut back and forth between different takes of the same dancers to give a composite of perspectives. His lighting designer, Ralph Holmes, utilized backlight to pull the dancers away from the background.

Choreographer Merce Cunningham and his longtime cinematographer, Charles Atlas, have found other solutions to the video-

dictable and lively, and I think we transfer that to our work in video. In *Fractions*, the sense of depth comes from never staying with one spatial notion for too long a time." The reverberation of the dancers' feet on a wooden floor (Cunningham works without music) also adds reality and the feeling that the dancers are moving through three-dimensional space. "In a sense," says Atlas, "it's similar to why tap dancing worked so well in the movies, where the sound of the feet tapping reinforced the step movement."

Twyla Tharp, one of the more imaginative and determined choreographers when it comes to merging dance with video, has recently approached the new medium by using its values rather than trying to circumvent them—a tack that is most noticeable in the three theater pieces that she directed and choreographed for CBS Cable last year under the umbrella title *Confessions of a Cornermaker*.

In the introduction to *Bach Duet*, one of the pieces, Tharp says that she wanted to create a dance about "a couple who would

Stories. Here, Tharp opted for drama rather than photographed movement. Using reverse shots and ignoring legs and feet, the traditional focus of dance, she closes in on the upper torsos and faces of the dancers, capturing the drama as they angrily crowd and threaten each other or caress each other with touches that seem more erotic because the camera catches the texture of hands, clothing, hair. Tharp herself has said that *Short Stories* is better in two dimensions than onstage.

If combining video and theater were simply a matter of re-creating what happens onstage, every television director now struggling with the likes of *Camelot* or *Vanities* would be rich and famous. Unfortunately, it isn't that easy, says filmmaker Shirley Clarke, who recently videotaped the plays *Savage/Love* and *Tongues*, two collaborations by actor-director Joseph Chaikin and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Sam Shepard. "Live theater has the ability to get your attention because of that energy that's happening between the actor and the audience," says Clarke. "The camera has to try to stand in for that. And that, in general, is the thrust of the problem in transforming something that exists very successfully onstage to either film or video. Film does it by opening it up, usually; if something is inside, they take it all around the world. My concern was to find a way to transform a play that affected me very much when I saw it live so that I could have the same effect on the audience watching the tape."

Tongues and *Savage/Love* are theater pieces created for voice and percussion. *Tongues*, as Shepard writes in his introduction to the published text, has to do with "voices. Voices traveling. Voices from the dead and living. Hypnotized voices. . . . Working voices." *Savage/Love* is about moments of love. Both plays are episodic. They tell no story, but move from one moment to another, focusing on an idea or image and expressing it through words and sound.

To prepare for the taping of *Savage/*

Twyla Tharp works with the medium, interpreting her dances for video.



Steven Caras

Love in 1981, Clarke saw the play several times at Joseph Papp's Public Theater, then watched a black-and-white tape of it that had been shot from the back of the house for Lincoln Center's performing arts library. Watching the tape confirmed Clarke's sense of the difference between videotape and stage presentation. "We all

The effect physicalizes the entrapment that the words convey.

"Two reasons for the cutting," says Clarke. "One, to make it easier to hear what Chaikin is saying, because generally, when someone gets up on the TV or film screen, I doze off. It's droning, and there's nothing to catch my attention. It is simply

into new territories. Nobody knows exactly how this is going to come out.

Using the new Panaflex video camera, which handles like a film camera and allows a director to look through the lens and see the scene he's directing without using a monitor—"It's disguised as a film camera," says Altman—he shot the two plays

"It's just that theater in the twenty-first century is electronics."

understood that it would transform itself into something else when we started. We worked knowing that could happen. In other words, I did not try to get the best interpretation of that stage play that could possibly be done, because I thought that little black-and-white tape at Lincoln Center was just fine for that purpose. It didn't do anything for you, but it did that."

Clarke tried to keep one point of view in making the tape, as if she were sitting in a seat in the house. She used two small RCA cameras. One would shoot close-ups; the other would slowly travel forward and backward. For Chaikin's sake, and to preserve the energy of continuous performance, she decided the takes would be uninterrupted, but nearly everything else was redesigned for video.

The spatial relationship between Chaikin and the musicians was changed. In the stage production, Chaikin would sit on a platform, with the musicians on the floor at his feet. But Clarke decided that the musicians would block cameras and interfere with lighting Chaikin, so she moved them to the side. "When I looked at the rushes," she says, "I realized two things were happening with the musicians. One, they looked wonderful, because they were playing little instruments that were sort of insane—glass jars and key chimes—which you hadn't been able to see in the darkness of the theater. The other thing I realized was that I needed something within the video frame to stand in for the audience. And who was better than the two people who were staring at Chaikin all the time anyway. So the musicians played this kind of double role, audience and participants."

In postproduction, Clarke edited in patterned and intricate cuts to break up the dialogue and to restructure the words. In a section called "Babble," where Chaikin repeats a few monosyllabic words in a frustrated attempt to communicate thought, Clarke used what she calls "flutter cutting." On tape, we see Chaikin's head move back and forth in a quick, jerky rhythm; then the image freezes for a few seconds; then the jerkiness begins again.

not like what happens when the real human being is there. By cutting the way I did, I'm making the viewer listen. The other thing it does is build the tension and excitement of the music of the play."

According to Clarke, she and Chaikin never worried about whether *Savage/Love* "lost" any values in its journey from stage to screen. "I don't think we ever held that discussion," says Clarke. "It became its own piece. We stopped talking about the play almost from the minute that both of us looked at the rushes."

Clarke brought the same philosophy about videotaping theater to *Tongues*, which she completed this spring. (She hopes both pieces, as well as a documentary about the taping, will air on PBS later this year.) During postproduction for *Tongues*, Clarke used the Quantel digital-effects machine, which can stretch an image so that it looks like an El Greco painting, squeeze it, flip it. "I'd seen it used in commercials and I always thought, Hey, wouldn't it be wonderful if...? And here was the perfect opportunity to find out what it looked like."

Clarke's approach is unique. Despite the number of cable and home video enterprises currently hustling for theater properties, the bulk of current video work is conventional. HBO (*Camelot*, *Vanities*, *Barefoot in the Park*) tapes off the stage before an audience. Group W Cable Productions shot Clifford Odet's *The Country Girl* like a teleplay, for initial run on Showtime. Even such an enterprising filmmaker as Robert Altman was more cautious than he would have liked to be during his first stab at combining theater and video.

In the fall of 1981, Altman directed *Rattlesnake in a Cooler* and *Precious Blood*, two one-act plays by a young writer named Frank South, for the off-Broadway theater St. Clements. Last spring he taped them for Alpha Repertory Television Service (ARTS), a Hearst-ABC cultural cable venture. "It was very enjoyable and very difficult," says Altman, "because you are going

in six days. Altman planned his shots somewhat more than he might have with a film script, "because the play was more set. . . ." The intention was to keep the material theatrical but hold it to a single sight line, "as if playing to an audience of one person but able to move that person around, change his position all the time."

"We talked about paraphrasing *Rattlesnake in a Cooler*," Altman says, "moving it totally outside and doing it in an exterior location—but decided that would make it a different animal. This still has a sense of theatricality about it; in other words, you know you are not watching a realistic movie. You are watching a stylized piece of theater, but you are not watching it in a theater and there is no audience."

In the move from theater to video, Altman emphasized realism, detail, and a filmic style of taping. Since the plays are monologues, Altman shot them mostly in long takes to preserve intensity. He edited out some lines ahead of time, "because I don't need so many words when I am able to show an actor's face in close-up." He changed the blocking: "Onstage we couldn't use parts of the sets economically, because of their position in relation to the audience. And now we could use them. I didn't have to bring an actor forward too much. I could play him deeper in the set."

On the stage set, the ceiling was slanted up and the sides fanned to open it to the audience. Altman rebuilt the set in the studio to create a more boxlike environment. And he added sound effects: glass breaking during a story about a barroom brawl, a car driving away. "On the stage you would say, 'Where are they?'—but they seem to work on tape."

The major trade-off? "On tape," says Altman, "you can never get that sense of being there, where that person could just cross the line and sit on your lap. You lose here, gain there." One particular gain for Altman was the close-up. In the video version of *Rattlesnake*, the actor squashes a bug onstage. In the *Precious Blood* tape, a threatening black gloved hand unlocks the door at the rear of the set. "We didn't even

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Hitchcock (black), **Cocteau** (black), **Garbo** (navy), **Bye Bye Brazil** (white), **RKO** (navy), **Skating Chaplin** (full-color). *Not shown:* Bergman's **7th Seal** (lt. blue or black), Rathbone's **Sherlock Holmes** (5 colors on tan), Richard Rush's **The Stuntman**.

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do that onstage, didn't have the lock there," Altman says. "That wouldn't have worked. You wouldn't have seen it. Onstage we did the man's entrance with lighting. He just opened the door and came into the room."

In *Precious Blood*, the woman reenacts an attempted rape. "On the stage," says Altman, "when the rape scene is done, you see the man sitting there—mute and immobile on a bench and she's over there carrying on this rape by herself. The way we did it on tape, you're able to see her carrying this out, and then suddenly we cut to his face. Onstage he was sitting there, and you knew he was there, but you didn't get to see him in close-up. I think *Precious Blood* is a little easier to understand on tape, because you get the impressionism of it, you get all the words, but your eye is not wandering; you're not searching the stage."

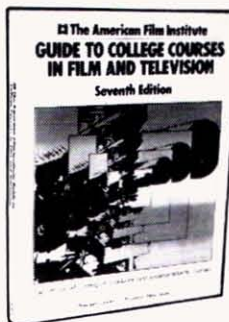
Despite Altman's satisfaction with the experience, he decided to shoot his next theater venture, *Come Back to the 5 & Dime Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, on 16mm film. "The basis of the whole play is a mirror—a through-the-looking-glass effect," he says. "On one side of the mirror, it's twenty years ago; on the other, it's today. Onstage we duplicated the set, but on film I'm going to use two-way mylar mirrors, so that some of the time, there will be an actual mirror image; other times I will change the light and shoot through the mirror and see people on the other side. It will be much more realistic than on the stage and much more magical, I think."

Altman can create these effects on film, a familiar medium, much more easily and quickly than on videotape. He will also shoot another project, David Rabe's play *Streamers*, on 16mm, because he wants an extremely high contrast that he does not think he can get with video. Altman is dubious about reports that the Ikegami EC-35 video camera is able to handle high contrast. "You can't handle the extreme blowout of the light that you can handle on film. Everyone says you can until you get on the floor with the technician, who tells you, 'Oh, well, you can't get quite that far.' When I learn the tools, then I probably will not bother with film. But I see no reason not to use film. I don't really care what it's done on, so long as I like the end result."

Evolving technology will add new possibilities for the conjunction of video and performance. According to Mark Schubert, technological consultant to PBS's "Live From Lincoln Center" since 1976: "Electronic cinematography will give video cameras the kind of scene contrast ability that

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Sense Out of Nonsense

Myron Meisel

In Blake Edwards's comedies,
there's more than meets the eye.

Blake Edwards by Peter Lehman and William Luhr. Ohio University Press, \$18.95; paper, \$8.95.

Americans have always been slow to honor their artists, particularly those film directors who have toiled in traditionally commercial genres and achieved popular success. Blake Edwards, the director of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *Days of Wine and Roses*, *The Pink Panther* series, "10", and *Victor/Victoria*, has never been fashionable among the high priests of cinematic culture, although he may be the most important American film director working today.

The French picked up on him almost immediately, and a few critics attuned to visual forms and personal cinema (among them, Andrew Sarris, Vincent Canby, and Stuart Byron) have recognized his uniquely modernist style and perspective. Now, with this first comprehensive study of his films, Edwards is being accorded the examination previously reserved for such filmmakers as Coppola, Scorsese, and Altman, although his contribution to cinema arguably exceeds that of any of them.

In *Blake Edwards*, Peter Lehman and William Luhr, assistant professors at Ohio University and New Jersey's St. Peter's College, respectively, have done an admirable job of spadework on Edwards's career, sifting through the films and identifying themes and areas ripe for further inquiry. They do well what academics do well: advancing the general case for the subject, parsing the texts, and, above all, validating the topic with the cachet of respectability. They also do badly what academics do badly: penetrating to the heart of material, relating the world of the films to the world at large, and enriching the aesthetic under review with one of their own.

Their book is an invaluable introduction, an opening shot in the "Edwardian" criti-

cal canon. Yet while its organization is functional and the level of observation fairly high, the level of insight is regrettably low. The book reads like a doctoral dissertation, replete with desultory nods to the prejudices of an institutional audience.

Lehman and Luhr crystallize the basic Edwards themes and define the essential conflict that underlies his disparate works. In Edwards's films, characters who assume there is a rational order find their confidence shattered by the capricious nature of existence, which upsets their stability, revealing it to be a sham. It's fascinating how this situation comfortably accommodates both the comedy and the suspense forms to which Edwards has traditionally been drawn. Lehman and Luhr point out that the paradigmatic Edwards hero is a detective, and that the stories often move forward through multiple layers of deception. Erroneous assumptions about the nature of things lead to still further misreadings of reality, whether the hero is Clouseau or Peter Gunn.

The book is exceptionally thorough about spotting phallic imagery, usually no more than a critics' parlor game, but in this case a revealing enterprise (it made me want to study the dogfights in *Darling Lili* one more time). The authors point out that phallic failure forms an integral part of the comedy in the Clouseau films, and they alertly discern the subtext of impotence, voyeurism, and sexual humiliation in all of Edwards's humor.

They recognize the highly experimental aspects of the otherwise conventional *High Time*; their exegesis of *The Tamarind Seed*, particularly in terms of color manipulation, is inspired; and they lucidly analyze selected shots. Every once in a while, the sort of insight that can come from criticism practiced as an art instead of as a pseudoscience will surface: "If war in *Darling Lili* is more like sex than hell, spying in *The Tamarind Seed* is more like

love than politics." I'm not arguing for facile phrasemaking, only for the sort of intense personal response to the material by critics that they demand of artists.

Adroit at Freudian interpretation, Lehman and Luhr are rather less deft at bringing a critical imagination to bear on their general findings. Their definition of purpose suggests the limitations of their approach: "Our basic assumption is that a perceptive discussion of themes can only take place within a careful, formal analysis." So far, so good, and the formal analyses, while uneven, are often acute. But in a drive to fit their data to their liberal ideologies, they go further: "We shall also deal with the way women threatened dominant cultural assumptions about their place in society . . . and the way in which dominant assumptions about the central role of white America in the progressive development of the world were threatened."

If you smell impending silliness, you're right. The authors give inordinate weight to whether the films end in a heterosexual clinch, finding Edwards's avoidance of such pat finishes symptomatic of a problem with women. (Not that their acumen is entirely off the beam: The observation that *Days of Wine and Roses* ends with "the woman's role taken by the emasculated male" is both accurate and provocative.) Lehman and Luhr further suggest that casting Peter Sellers as a Hindu in *The Party* displays Hollywood's ingrained racial prejudice against Third World non-stars. Later the authors posit that because Edwards casts Orientals alternately as sympathetic figures and as comic figures, he is ambivalent about them.

Throughout the book, Lehman and Luhr are so intent on their own ideological purity that they ignore alternative readings of the films. Many male relationships that are

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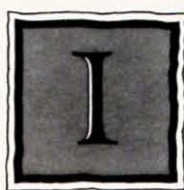
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FITZCARRALDO

from page 51



Iquitos is a rubber-boom town built at the turn of the century, with fancy tiled buildings set right next to corrugated tin shacks, several graceful structures designed by A.G. Eiffel (of tower fame), and an entire ramshackle district, Belén, that floats on the Amazon. Two hundred thousand people live here at the edge of the jungle. The muddy streets are crowded with buzzing Honda 175s on collision courses, some carrying families of five, some carrying dating teenage couples, with the girl, typically in tight red pants, riding sidesaddle in back, her legs raised just enough to keep her spike heels out of the mud. The air is hot and wet, permeated with the heavy smell of gasoline, food, perspiration, and the broad, muddy Amazon.

Getting out of the jungle seems to have lifted an unspeakable weight of despair from Herzog's shoulders. All he has to do now is direct a movie.

Claudia Cardinale is here, too, with a few more lines around her eyes than she had in *8½*, but still radiant and serene—and her smiling professionalism is a perfect counterbalance to the increasing tension between Herzog and Kinski. Verbal fire-fights are traditional between these two, but Kinski's outbursts are growing more frequent and more unpleasant. "During the scenes he is still as good as he was at the beginning," Herzog notes, "but before and after the scenes he is losing his nerve. Yesterday we fought about a line, and he called me a coward—but I am not a coward. Basically, he is terrified of being filmed."

They shoot a scene in front of Cardinale's whorehouse, with Kinski charging in and knocking down a customer in his impatience to show Cardinale maps revealing the two jungle rivers. They shoot an intimate bedroom scene with Kinski, Cardinale, a hammock, and a baby ocelot. They shoot a complicated garden party sequence with half the women in Iquitos wearing gorgeous period costumes and a monstrous, smelly river fish (with a piranha in its mouth) moving through the crowd on a tray. They shoot a scene in the stinking muck at the edge of the Amazon—Kinski, Cardinale, and Herzog all slip into the mud, and Blank nearly falls over when a pig he's filming tries to walk between his legs. Usually Herzog shoots just one angle

on a scene, moving fast and confidently, and as soon as he gets a performance he likes, he goes on to the next.

One morning Herzog sets off on his motorcycle, riding casually through deep mud puddles and piles of refuse toward the river, with cast, crew, and documentarists following in pickup trucks. Herzog is wearing a Yazoo Records T-shirt. "In some native language it means 'death,'" he observes happily.

We schlepp our heavy equipment down a steep hill toward the Amazon—through the crowded produce market, past giant piles of green plantains, huge mounds of sweet-smelling oranges, and Eiffel's delicate sheet-metal gazebo, between tall heaps of garbage that tower over our heads, through deepening muck in which pigs are swimming, over teetery wooden planks half sunk in malodorous slime, down a tiny street with Amazon floodwater lapping up to the mud. From here, dugout canoes will carry us into the waterways of Belén.

Our canoe driver poles us into deeper water, past drifting melons and discarded bananas, between rows of wooden shacks floating on large balsa logs or raised above the river on stilts. All around us boat traffic is in constant motion. Women wash clothes on their front steps, or tend flower gardens built on loose tangles of lumber floating behind their shacks. Three kids play waist-deep in the murky water, fighting over a squawking parrot.

There are a few primitive electric lights on high poles, but no sewage lines—just square holes in the floors of the houses. When I ask about the proximity of the kids to the raw waste, Herzog seems annoyed. "You speak as an American," he says, "and Americans are obsessed with hygiene. A society that overstresses cleanliness is not far away from genocide. The children don't care. And I swim in the river as well, and I wouldn't care, either. That's a kind of life that people have accepted, and they like it. It's very natural."

Our driver paddles us between the shacks (and right underneath some of the ones on stilts), until an attractive, airy stilt house, blazing with blue-white electric light, emerges from behind a half-sunken balsa floater. A familiar aria drifts from the horn of a windup Victrola on the upper floor: Enrico Caruso singing "E lucévan le stelle" from *Tosca*. This is Fitzcarraldo's house, which everyone calls "Casa Fitz."

"If I had a choice of anywhere in the world to live, this would be the place," says Herzog, gazing out at the river while crew members set lights and string cables from the gas generator. "Today you will see me

direct a film from here." He sinks into a hammock. But presently Kinski arrives, looking as if he just ate a lemon, and launches into a bitter tirade, the point of which is that he's got a big mosquito bite on his face and won't do any close-ups.

Fortunately, Herzog has an alternative scene he can shoot, but he needs a few extras. So when he spies a wizened old man in a boat, he waves him over, removes his greasy hat, fingers his hair, and asks him if he'd like to be in a movie. The man nods, and Herzog strides back upstairs.

"Maureen," he says, "I want you to take off your pants."

"You do?"

"Just for the shot. We need your pants for this old man. We'll get you a raincoat."

But before the transfer can occur, Herzog decides to shoot a different sequence altogether, and he paddles off with two canoes to film long shots of Kinski rowing through the streets of Belen.

Back in the production office, Herzog's half brother Lucki is sending yard-long telexes to Munich, begging investors for money he's unlikely to get. Herzog may be out of the jungle, but he's not out of the woods. Both of his ships are stuck—one on a sandbank, the other at the base of a forty-degree mud slope—and his film is stuck along with them. No one knows how *Fitzcarraldo* can be completed. And yet Herzog seems to find strength somewhere—maybe in the knowledge that he's living out some ultimate metaphor representing every filmmaker who struggles to make a film, every artist who *has* to do the impossible. If his madness is unmistakable, so is his courage.

At the end of the shooting day, we boat back to the muddy shore of the Amazon and plod wearily up to where the pickup trucks are waiting. Gosling starts to climb into one, but before she makes it, Herzog picks her up and holds her in the air. "I know you like strong men, Maureen," he says, smiling and spinning her around. "I am not like other men."

Epilogue:

Crashing Through the Rapids of Death

In Herzog's film, after the Indians pull the ship over the hill, there's a giant, drunken party, and Fitzcarraldo passes out in his cabin. While he sleeps, the Indians release the ship. They have their own dream—a dream in which they sacrifice the ship to the water spirits. Fitzcarraldo stumbles on deck to find himself crashing through the Rapids of Death. His dream is shattered. Nonetheless, Herzog's film ends

with Fitzcarraldo achieving a victory of sorts. He sells his battered steamship and makes just enough money to bring a small-time opera troupe to Iquitos for a single performance.

In the end, Herzog was victorious, too. After months of work, using heavier equipment and a construction crew from Lima, he pulled his ship to the top of the hill. With this success, emergency financing was arranged. Now all Herzog needed was for the rainy season to flood the river so he could get one of the ships to Iquitos for the final sequence of the picture. But as month followed month in the longest dry season in recorded history, it began to appear that the curse of the jungle would defeat Herzog after all.

At the last possible moment, when almost all of the emergency money was gone, the rains came—and there was a thrilling, downriver steamship race to reach Iquitos before cast and crew had to return to Germany. In November 1981, almost four years after preproduction began, the last shot of *Fitzcarraldo* was completed. ■

Michael Goodwin is a free-lance writer living in San Francisco. He specializes in articles on film and traditional American music. From 1971 to 1974, he was managing editor of *Take One*, the late Canadian film journal.

BOOKS

from page 71

analyzed as homoerotic exclusions of women could also be interpreted usefully in mentor-protégé terms. With a certain humorlessness, the authors miss the sense of play in the films. They take the running gag in *Gunn* about cabbies and delivery boys calling Peter by female names too seriously as an expression of bizarre sexual confusion: They're not hip to when Edwards is putting them on.

No matter how flawed, this is an important and useful book. The notion that any critical work on a worthwhile artist must be definitive belittles the variety of insight and response possible to the work, which by its nature is ceaselessly allusive. Lehman and Luhr find the ending of "10" threatening, because the telescope is trained on Moore and Andrews as the reunited lovers. I disagree. The essence of "10" is that there is no sex in the film at all until after it ends. The movie is over only when sex becomes possible. But the value of *Blake Edwards* lies in its initiation of discussion on this intriguingly complex artist's work. It makes constructive criticism possible. ■

Myron Meisel is a Los Angeles producer, writer, and lawyer.

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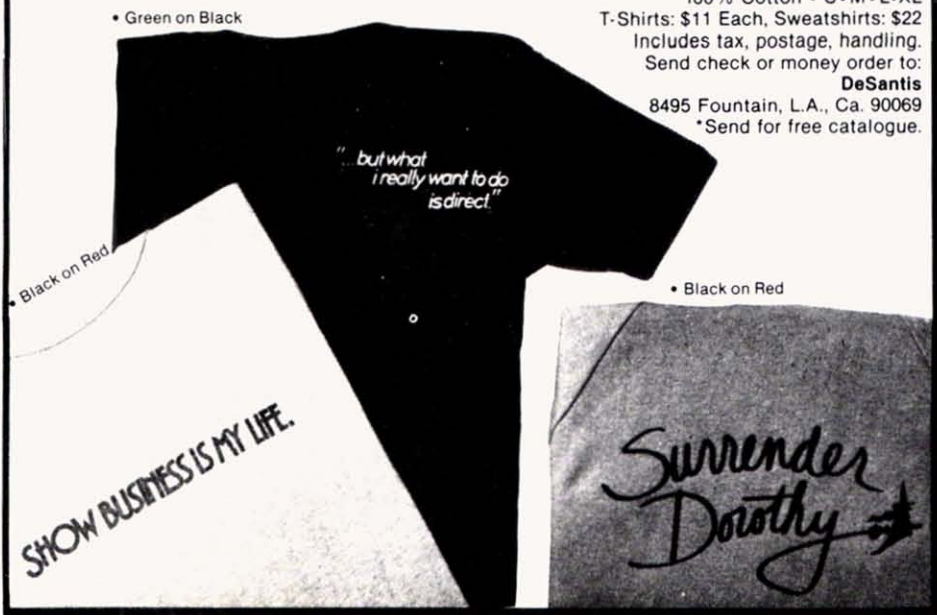
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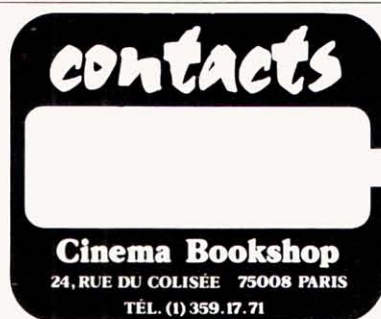
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STEVE MARTIN

from page 32

five comedies. Now I want to make twenty." He smiles. "Just a string of comedies." No messages, no interest in taking on particular genres, now that he and Reiner have "done" film noir. No models among filmmakers, "although I do admire Woody Allen. I'd love to get into that position. He sits back, does one movie every two years or so. And they're always of quality and interest. You always wonder what he's gonna do next, and you always want to see it."

But will Steve Martin's legion of fans want to see *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*? After all, this is a movie tribute to a genre that's older than most of those fans. So why did Martin decide on this project? Perhaps Herbert Ross has the best answer. "When I asked Steve why he wanted to do *Pennies From Heaven* and did he think his audience was prepared to follow him this way, he said, 'If you become a slave to your audience, the audience gets tired of you. The audience has followed me up to now. What you can't do is keep repeating what you did.' " 


Ben Fong-Torres has written for *Rolling Stone*, *Esquire*, and *Playboy*.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

from page 70

up to now has been available only to film." Filmmakers shooting performance tapes will no longer have to adjust to the flat lighting usually needed for television. Other inventions, like AcmeCartoon's Emulsifier, are already helping to give video the look of film.

In the future, high-resolution television will provide video with a totally new aesthetic appearance: crisper, clearer, with more brilliant color rendition. But, as always, technology will be only as helpful or as stimulating as the imagination of the artist using it.

Perhaps the final word on combining performance and video should go to Shirley Clarke: "Video is really the art that finally synthesizes all of the arts. I think part of the reason filmmakers are going back to theater is because we know that when we deal with the new technologies, we're going to have to bring all our history with us. I mean, all of this is theater that we're talking about. It's just that theater in the twenty-first century is electronics." 

Alexis Greene is a New York-based free-lancer who writes frequently about television and the performing arts.

Firefox

Clint Eastwood fans, take note: After forays into slapstick (the *Every Which Way/Any Which Way* films) and whimsy (*Bronco Billy*), Clint is back, playing the lean, mean man of action. In *Firefox* he is a military pilot who comes out of retirement to help American and British intelligence steal a Soviet superplane whose sophisticated technology has put the NATO countries at a dangerous disadvantage. The plane's code name is "Firefox," also the title of the novel screenwriters Alex Lasker and Wendell Wellman adapted for star-producer-director Eastwood. Special effects are by *Star Wars* ace John Dykstra. And, best of all, no orangutans.

Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan



Spock's second: Kirstie Alley, Nimoy.

For those of us who need a fix of outer space derring-do and can't wait for the next *Star Wars* chapter, there's the latest adventure of the gallant crew of the *Starship Enterprise*. William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy are back on board, this time battling Ricardo Montalban as the evil renegade Khan, a twentieth-century villain who has projected himself into the twenty-third century just to give Kirk and Spock someone to chase out there in space. Directing is novelist Nicholas Meyer, whose one previous film, *Time After Time*, played similar tricks with time travel. The question is, can *Trek II* hold its own in competition with all the other special effects films of this summer? And, more important, will Kirk and Spock live to fight another day, in another sequel?

Megaforce

If you think Clint Eastwood's return to action this month isn't too much of a good thing, you'll probably be in the mood for

Megaforce, in which an internationally handpicked band of soldiers of fortune defends a tiny nation from invasion by the foes of democracy (read: Communists). Barry Bostwick, as Commander Ace Hunter (no kidding), heads up the megameres; among his sidekicks are Persis Khambatta (the skinhead beauty from *Star Trek*) and Michael Beck (the gang leader from *The Warriors*). *Megaforce*'s real star may be its greater than state-of-the-art weaponry, which includes a fleet of vehicles armed with lasers, machine guns, rockets, range finders, heat shields—need we go on? Directing this \$18 million production is Hal Needham, of *Smokey and the Bandit* and *Cannonball Run* fame and fortune. Sounds like Howard ("Hill Street Blues") Hunter's kind of film.

E.T.

E.T. does not stand for "extra texture" or "Ernest Tubb," but "extraterrestrial," as in "alien," as in "things that go bump in outer space," as in, say, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Director Steven Spielberg has decided to give Indiana Jones and his bullwhip the summer off, turning instead to this tale of a little green man who's left behind by his space mates during a stopover on earth. He (she? it?) is adopted by a young boy (Henry Thomas, the older son in *Raggedy Man*) who keeps him in his bedroom closet and takes him outside only on Halloween. Because its special effects are reputed to be so benign (no decapitations here), *E.T.* may prove to be the one effects film this summer that doesn't try to give its viewers gray hair or coronaries.

Author! Author!

It's hard to believe that it has been only ten years since Al Pacino's stunning performance in *The Godfather* made him a star. Each of his subsequent films found him playing intense, self-absorbed characters, but his new one offers him a lighter role. In *Author! Author!* he plays Ivan Travalian, successful playwright, idolized father, and cuckolded husband—his wife, played by Tuesday Weld, is leaving him for another man. Ivan's troubles multiply when he gets romantically involved with the leading lady of his new play (Dyan Cannon). It will be interesting to watch Pacino play essentially comic material, written by Israel Horowitz (whose *The Indian Wants the Bronx* was an early Pacino stage hit), and directed by Arthur Hiller, no stranger to comedy with *The In-Laws* and *The Hospital*.

Hanky Panky



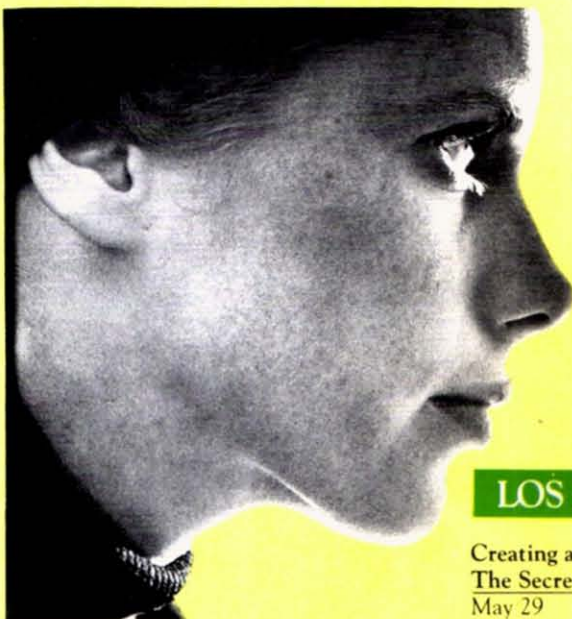
Second time around: Poitier, Wilder.

After the runaway success of *Stir Crazy*, you might expect actors Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor to team up again with actor-turned-director Sidney Poitier. But with Pryor moving on to other gigs, we'll have to settle for two out of three in *Hanky Panky*, in which Wilder plays an innocent bystander caught up in international intrigue involving valuable computer tapes. If this sounds like straight Hitchcock, it's actually played with a comic twist, more like *Silver Streak*, this time with Gilda Radner as the romantic lead and Richard Widmark as the villain. In a summer full of barbarians, aliens, and poltergeists, a film like *Hanky Panky*, with characters bearing more than a passing resemblance to human beings, has more than a ghost of a chance for success.

Grease 2

What can you say about a sequel to the most successful movie musical of all time, which was based on the longest running Broadway show ever? That it's got big shoes to fill? Yes, and this, too: If you're hopelessly devoted to John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John, don't look for them here. They've graduated, and the senior class is now headed by pretty boy Maxwell Caulfield, who has the hots for Michelle Pfeiffer, greaser queen of the outlaw sorority the Pink Ladies. In support are more familiar faces—Sid Caesar, Dody Goodman, Tab Hunter, and Connie Stevens—and directing all of this good-natured nonsense is Patricia Birch, who choreographed *Grease*.

AFI Events Around the Country



Liv Ullmann in *Persona*

velopment of the Steadicam); Robert Jessup, ASC ("Dallas," *Daddy Blessing*, *Skyward*, *Captured*); among others.

Motion Pictures from Acquisition to Exhibition

June 19

Key business and legal aspects of motion picture production are covered by producer/attorney Harold Messing.

The Business of Acting

June 12

This one-day seminar dissects the legal and business aspects of working as an actor in the film and television industries.

Financing Options for Motion Picture Production

June 26

An intensive all-day examination of methods and sources for financing motion pictures in today's market.

LOS ANGELES

Creating an Animated Feature: The Secret of NIMH

May 29

An in-depth look at both the creative and business decisions involved in the production of an animated feature in the classical style.

Post-Production: An Inside View

June 12

This intensive one-day seminar examines the key roles within a post-production team and analyzes the highly collaborative process of picture and special effects editing, dubbing, mixing, musical composition, and sound editing.

Hitchcock's Trilogy: Psycho, The Birds, Marnie

June 19 & 20

An all-weekend film/lecture series with noted Hitchcock scholar Donald Spoto and guest commentary by Janet Leigh and Tippi Hedren.

LA County Museum

"Sudden Fear" continues with *The Third Man*, *Klute*, *North by Northwest*, *Manhunt*, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* ('78). For program details, call (213) 857-6202.

BOSTON

From Audition to Performance: Acting for the Camera

May 22

An intensive one-day workshop simulating the audition process and refining acting techniques for the camera with director Norman Gevanthor and casting director/producer Bonnie Nelson Schwartz.

CHICAGO

Film Editing: An Inside View

June 12

A look at the often unappreciated art of editing with a panel of top editors headed by Ralph Rosenblum (*The Pawnbroker*, *Annie Hall*, and author of *When the Shooting Stops . . . the Cutting Begins*).

CLEVELAND

China Film Week

June 14-20

A program of feature films from the People's Republic of China will be presented by the Cleveland International Film Festival. For details, call (202) 828-4028.

DALLAS

Cinematography: An Inside View

June 6

With William Fraker, ASC (*Rosemary's Baby*, *Heaven Can Wait*, *Sharky's Machine*, *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*); Garrett Brown (Academy Award-winner for his de-

NEW YORK

Musical Scoring: An Inside View

May 22

Invited speakers include John Barry (*Midnight Cowboy*), Michael Small (*Klute*), John Williams (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*), Giorgio Moroder (*American Gigolo*), and Steve Karmen ("I Love New York"), among others.

Realism & Anti-Realism:

A Film/Lecture Weekend

June 19 & 20

An exploration of style, convention, and ideology in film theory as they relate to realism and anti-realism with Christopher Williams, author of *Realism and Cinema*.

SAN FRANCISCO

Motion Pictures from Acquisition to Exhibition

May 22

See Dallas.

Ingmar Bergman:

Four Later Masterpieces

July 31 & August 1

This intensive weekend film/lecture series takes a retrospective look at four of the director's greatest and most controversial films of the 1960s and 70s: *Persona*, *Shame*, *The Passion of Anna*, and *Cries and Whispers*. Lecture and commentary by Ron Geatz of The American Film Institute.

WASHINGTON, DC

Independent Film & Video:

Financing and Marketing Techniques

May 22

Michael Wiese, author of *The Independent Filmmaker's Guide* and producer of *Hardware Wars* and *Dolphin*, examines critical financing and marketing techniques.

Great Performances: Liv Ullmann on Film

July 17 & 18

Audience discussion with Liv Ullmann highlights this weekend series focusing on one of the world's great actresses. Screenings include *Persona*, *The Emigrants*, *Face to Face*, *The Abduction*, and a special video screening of Cocteau's *The Human Voice*.

AFI Theater, John F. Kennedy Center

New series include "Masterworks," with *Intolerance*, *Children of Paradise*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and *Ruggles of Red Gap*; the complete six-film "Thin Man" series; "Funny Pages," with *L'il Abner*, the original *Blondie*, and *Prince Valiant*; and the Washington premiere of Errol Morris's *Gates of Heaven*. For program details, call (202) 785-4600.

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From Capra to Coppola



This spring, two AFI events within a month brought me into contact with both Francis Coppola and Frank Capra. On the surface, the two seem to have little in common—other than their outstanding reputations as film directors and their Italian roots. After all, they represent two different generations of artists in this country, and the philosophy of life that some of their better-known films reflect does seem to point up what a long way we've come from *It's a Wonderful Life* to *Apocalypse Now*.

But as I listened to Coppola during his visit to Washington for the D.C. premiere of Abel Gance's *Napoleon*, and listened to Capra in the days just before and after he received the AFI Life Achievement Award, I became fascinated not by the differences but by the similarities between these two great filmmakers.

So I tried to arrange some of their observations in my own mind, and came up with a list that, in part, may be "interesting coincidences" between Capra and Coppola, but that also contains some "significant correlations," I think, on the subjects of art, craft, technology, business—all those elements that in combination make up the world of filmmaking.

Both men are consummate professionals, perfectionists who pay no less attention to the craft of filmmaking than they pay to the art. Capra's concern with the impact of cinematography and editing on film, his longtime association with Joseph Walker (who pioneered in the use of the zoom lens) and William Hornbeck, echo Coppola's pioneering work with video, his alliance with Vittorio Storaro, his "painted canvases" in *One From the Heart*.

Unlike many artists, who see technological progress as a threat to creativity, both Capra and Coppola have a near-visionary faith that technology's advances bring the possibility of a "golden age" for art.

And despite the differences between their films—Capra's steadfastly affirmative attitudes and happy endings, Coppola's often frightening premonitions of societal collapse—both men are genuine patriots, boosting or haranguing this country with the identical loving motive. They *believe* in America.

In the end, I decided that these similarities do not offer any clues about filmmaking genius, although they are indicators of the curiosity, analytic ability, and perseverance that mark all men of achievement—bankers, barristers, or artists. All of those attributes have added polish to Capra's and Coppola's work; no single one really *animates* the filmmakers' creativity. To find out what does, I had to consider the feelings—the heart, not the intellect—that the two have in common.

Here are Capra and Coppola on a few subjects close to their hearts.

On Hollywood, Past and Present:

"The men who ran those [early] studios were *showmen*. They loved show business, they wanted it, they grew up with it. The people who are doing it today are doing it just to see if they can make money at it. It all becomes a financial transaction."

—Capra

"The companies that made this country take the world into modern times were people like George Eastman... Henry Ford, Thomas Edison. We know the names. And when they went their way, those roles of leadership were taken over by the Harvard Business School. [They] were taken over by the mentality of: 'How is the company going to do in three months?'..."

—Coppola

On Risk Taking:

"It takes guts and courage to make films. You've got to have a tremendous belief in yourself, or anybody can make you swerve. It's a matter of choices. I could flip a coin and make a decision on heads or tails and I'd be fifty percent right. And if you're fifty percent right in show business, you're way ahead. That's what I banked on."

—Capra

"I'm a guy who is generally considered to be reckless... you're always flying by the seat of your pants if you wish to grab hold of intuition or an instinct and go with it."

—Coppola

On Art, Idealism, and the Future:

"I find the kids are hungry for idealism, and they don't get it... Maybe it's because we've lost some of that feeling of who we are, how we got this way, what the value of our ideas are, the importance of the individual and the hard work of the individual, the importance of the past, and the importance of our ideas and ideals that we live under."

—Capra

"We can't keep taking our children's future and sort of turning it into short-term profits. We have to educate them in knowledge, but teach them optimism and teach them something that *they* could teach *us* about, this new generation—idealism. And ethics."

—Coppola

What became clear to me, after all these comparisons, is that from Capra to Coppola, great filmmaking is a merger of the head and the heart, but involves something else, too, something that no analysis can ever pin down.

Leon Lustenberg



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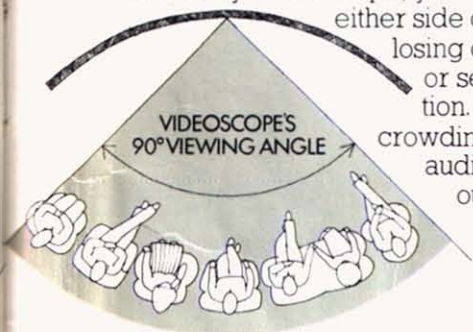


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